



A PAC GUIDE TO MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR RESEARCH

LEARNING FROM THE PEER ACTION COLLECTIVE

March 2023



Proudly supporting
youth social action



INTRODUCTION

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a £5.2 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op Group.

PAC was set up in 2021 to create a network of young people resourced to lead research and take action on issues related to youth violence. They worked in 10 areas of England and Wales, each supported by a Delivery Partnership.

As Learning Partners, we know that research is not merely a set of techniques that can be taught and applied. It is a craft that is developed through the practice of doing and reflecting. This involves accepting that things go wrong and learning from all experiences.

This short guide, developed through conversations between the PAC Learning Partner, Peer Researchers and Delivery Partners, shares advice about:

Reaching out to other children and young people in research	p.3
Building research relationships, through which other young people can tell their stories	p. 4
Generating research data that can tell compelling and emotionally resonant stories and inspire social action and change	p.6
Linking research to opportunities for taking action	p.6

Reaching out

“Learning Partner: I wonder, what was it like trying to build connections with other young people that you were interviewing. What? What was it like?

“Peer Researcher: Um, so it were quite challenging to be honest. I think particularly with young boys, I think they kind of get the impression that “You don't know where I'm coming from and you kind of don't understand what I'm talking about”. So, in that sense I found it quite hard to communicate ... did try like multiple ways of trying to get them ...you know, interested in what we were doing.

Peer Researchers created a guide to help other peer researchers to choose a focus for their research [Designing your research project](#)

When your focus is clear, this advice from peer researchers can help in reaching out to children and young people who may be interested in taking part in your research:

- Seek diverse young people. Reach out to and into a broad range of (formal vs informal) settings in which young people spend time for different reasons.
- Recognise that how a research interview or discussion group is set up and staged matters. Where it happens (school vs youth work setting vs community venue), the approach used (groupbased vs 1-2-1/ formal interview vs conversational or creative approach) will make a difference to how it feels to take part and to what it may be possible for young people to say about a subject like violence.
- There is always a tension between breadth and depth in research. Interviewing more people means a larger sample size, which can help make your findings more persuasive to some audiences. But it can help to conduct fewer, more detailed interviews, because this leads to richer data about individuals and contexts. These priorities need to be discussed in terms of the overall objectives of each individual project.
- Create the physical and emotional conditions in which a conversation is possible. Recognise that these may differ for different individuals or groups,

different ages and understand that approaches may need to be changed for different contexts.

- Show a real interest in people's views and experiences and to ask follow up questions, rather than simply sticking to the set interview questions.
- Do not make assumptions about young people's lived experience of violence (e.g. based on where they live) or what they might choose to contribute on the basis of their own experience.
- Take care to allow young people to exit from research conversations at any point, without the need for explanation.

Research Relationships – workshops, education and research

Peer researchers have learned that helping participants and researchers feel relaxed and confident in communicating with each other is really important in researching subjects such as violence. To achieve these sorts of research relationships, some have chosen to deliver engagement activities alongside research (e.g. football activities and workshops). These can include either regular outreach sessions in community spaces, or creative activities in which young people become familiar with each other and with the purpose of the project. These activities can help to build rapport and familiarity between peer researchers and potential participant children, helping people move from *'being suspicious or naughty'* to *'being like – what are we doing today?'*

“ I'd say that I have realised that you don't always have to approach things too officially and you don't have to get into it [ie the discussion] head on. You can find another way into it so that they are more relaxed. I'd say that the key is to build relationships with the young people you are working with, so that they feel comfortable talking with you.

Keep the difference clear between engagement activities, education activities and research, because they have different objectives.

Peer education on violence delivered before a focus group might influence what is said within it. In some cases, some researchers feel the impulse to provide solutions to the young people they interview. However, it is possible to learn how to listen when things are uncomfortable, rather than offering advice. This challenge is common for researchers of all ages. There is [guidance](#) available on how to critically reflect and decide on when and how to respond to concerns raised in the interview space.

Critical reflection in the team is highly valued

Peer researchers really value having a means of debriefing, in order to reflect on and understand the dynamics in research interviews and discussion groups. Peer researchers have also used critical reflection to identify how they could use their methods more effectively, how to collect all the relevant demographic data in group research settings, and how to have a more accurate understanding of the time needed.

It is important to work in a trauma informed way in research around violence.

- We have co-produced a resource to support working in this way:
- <https://www.ucanmakechange2.org/trauma-informed-peer-research/>

Research relationships are also built on the language that is being used

Many young people do tend to have greater competence than adults in understanding what will be intelligible to other young people. So be careful in the rewording of questions through ethics approval – the key questions are:

- Does this change act as a barrier to relationship building and understanding? and
- Are peer researchers aware that they can adapt questions to suit each interviewee's communication style as long as they do not change the meaning of the question?

Creating credible and resonant data

Maximising credibility is about doing everything you can to make sure your research can convince people you hope to influence to understand and to respond in the ways you want them to. The different stakeholders will all have slightly different ideas about what is convincing.

The [The 7 credibility tests](#) cocreated resource can help you to plan your research and to reflect on how you are collecting, analysing and reporting your data. You can use the questions at any point in your research to help you focus what you are doing, or to decide how to report what you found out and to take your ideas out through social action.

Here is a summary of these:

- Is your overall research question clear and simple?
- Can you give a full explanation of your research methods?
- Can you fully explain who your research participants are?
- Can you fully explain your approach to reflection and analysis?
- Can you explain the strengths and limitations of your research?
- Are you reporting a balanced story about what you found out?
- Are you making specific calls to action based on your research?

Creating a bridge between evidence and social action

It is important to link research evidence and social action all the way through a project. These are part of a cycle in which peer researchers can reflect on their own ideas and explore what opportunities there are to take action, trying out ideas in practice, finding evidence and using new evidence to inform social action; followed by more research and more action.

Create a list of the different audiences for your research which may include different groups of children and young people, different organisations, politicians and policy makers.

Think about who works and runs the police, schools, youth services, community settings etc. It is useful to identify which – local, regional and national – decision makers have the power, interest and capacity to support social action around your research subject(s) and to consider strategically how and when to approach them and what they can be asked to do.

Match the outputs from your research to the different audiences and stakeholders who you hope to influence and recruit into supporting social action.

Other peer researchers have found it good to create these sorts of things:

- Written research reports, short summaries, fact sheets, elevator speeches, letters and presentations.
- Exhibitions of art, photography and writing, sometimes accompanied by presentations and events.
- Live performance, screenings and presentations with question and answer sessions, round tables and post-performance discussions.
- Fictional, provocative, research summary and documentary films.
- Poems.
- Hosting or attending community forums or meetings with decision makers (teachers, community workers, policy makers politicians at community, local, national and international levels).
- Joining existing decision-making committees to carve out opportunities for face to face discussion.
- Social media campaigns, street protests and acts of resistance.
- Leading tours of locations related to the research findings.
- Creating training and educational materials for different groups including children and professionals.

There will be some inevitable challenges to overcome in delivering on social action goals.

Some forms of action (e.g. hosting workshops for young people) are easier to achieve than others (e.g. achieving policy change). And if your goal is to achieve sustainable change it is good to try to achieve change in different

ways. Other young peer researchers have found it useful to reflect on these questions:

- How can we make connections to potential influential decision makers from the start of the project? And how can we maintain a conversation with these people as the work develops?
- How can we develop and maintain momentum towards social change, including beyond the project lifetime?
- Which social action activities led by young people can you link your findings into?
- When should we formulate clear demands to decision makers? It is important to wait until you have the clearest and most compelling evidence.
- How will you ensure that critical views from your research are not silenced if they disrupt existing alliances between adults or existing practices in organisations?
- Are there other allies that you can get on board so that you can speak freely and with confidence?
- Can you predict some of the criticisms you may receive from stakeholders and can you plan for these?

For more advice from peer researchers check out the website <https://www.ucanmakechange2.org/advice-bank/>

Acknowledgements

This guide has been written with contributions from young people and adults involved in the 2021-2023 Peer Action Collective. We are very grateful to the for their insights, particularly to the young people who attended the PAC Forum.

Learning Partner researchers were Ali Roy, Cath Larkins, Darren Sharpe, Nicola Farrelly, Nora Morocza, Charlotte Ennis, Cora Rooney, Sarah Tatham, and Jacqueline Dodding The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation at the University of Central Lancashire and Institute for Connected Communities, University of East London. Young people who contributed to the PAC forum are also co-authors of this guide.

