

Involving Young Londoners: A review of participatory approaches in the youth sector



**Partnership
for Young
London**

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Tackling poverty and inequality

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Introduction



Introduction

Involving young people in the research into their lives, and the decisions that impact them is vital in the work that we do with them.

Peer research, participatory approach, community action research, participatory action research, or youth-led, or community-led research. There are a variety of ways to describe young people's participation in research and decision making, and even more variety in how it is being done. This review is a small look into how some organisations are navigating their own participatory approach with young people; from funding, to recruitment, to the impact they have seen.

Participatory approaches are important in redressing the democratic deficit between young people and the organisations and institutions that impact their lives. Young people need to be provided a meaningful opportunity to choose and design the research about them and use it to influence the decisions that will directly affect them. Participation should provide young people with a sense of ownership, and help de-mystify research, policy making, and how decisions about funding are made.

In practice too, young people's participation in the research process also provides huge benefits for the research and those involved. The work becomes more relevant and authentic with their unique lived experience providing invaluable insight. Their existing relationships with the community, or area, can help foster the trust that is so important when doing work with the community. While their participation will build their own skills, in research, or communication, and the soft skills needed to approach sometimes challenging conversations.

Partnership for Young London, funded by Trust for London, has been supporting youth sector organisations across London to conduct their own participatory approaches since 2019. So far, no two projects have been the same. Some last two weeks, some six months, some involve young people at every step, some in certain stages. There is no clear one size fits all model for participation with young people, however this report will attempt to shed a light on some of the ways it has been done.

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Key Findings

- 01.** Projects varied in budget, and source of funding, but averaged around £40k for a year.
- 02.** Recruitment is often the most time consuming and challenging part of the participatory approach, to ensure relevant representation of lived experience.
- 03.** Vouchers are the most common way to pay young people due to a lack of clarity of the impact of payment on benefits.
- 04.** On average training lasted less than 10 hours in total, and focused more on practical information (how to conduct interviews, fill out consent forms) than theory.
- 05.** Participatory research can bring up additional challenges when considering safeguarding for the young people involved.
- 06.** The quality of research, such as sample size or honesty of responses, was improved through young people conducting the research.

Recommendations

- 01.** Creation of a toolkit to support organisations to conduct their own peer research projects with young people.
- 02.** Understand the legal advice around remunerations and find a solution to how we remunerate young people and reduce financial barriers to participation without risking them being penalised.
- 03.** Design an evaluation tool for young people that is flexible, with outcomes that can be co-produced with them, and considers the different phases of the process and different decisions that they might make.
- 04.** Provide an online resource of video training and digital tools that organisations can use to supplement their training of young people as peer researchers.
- 05.** Conduct a peer research project into peer research projects, and provide some quantitative evidence for the benefits that young people experience.
- 06.** Build a directory of participatory projects with young people.

Methodology

The aim of this report was to explore how young people are currently participating in research into their lives, or their communities, and the impact that their involvement had. In particular we looked at the following aspects:

- **Funding:** How is participatory research funded? How much does it cost?
- **Recruitment:** How are young people recruited?
- **Decision making:** What decisions are young people making? How are they involved in the research process?

Who did we speak to?

- We interviewed over 20 different organisations for this report.
- Most of the organisations are based primarily in London and focus on young people.
- Most organisations had little or no experience in participatory research prior to their project.
- Most organisations were youth sector charities however, we also spoke to housing associations, funders, and a consultancy firm.
- We spoke to organisations who had completed participatory research in the past two years, and two who were currently in the process of it.
- Projects ranged in topics, such as employment, health, education, housing, and services.

How did we speak to them?

- This report is the result of over 10 hours of conversations with practitioners.
- Interviews were conducted over the phone, recorded and transcribed.
- They were asked around 30 questions, depending on the answers.
- Answers were anonymised, but some of the organisations we spoke to also provided information about their projects to be shared publicly.

Organisations

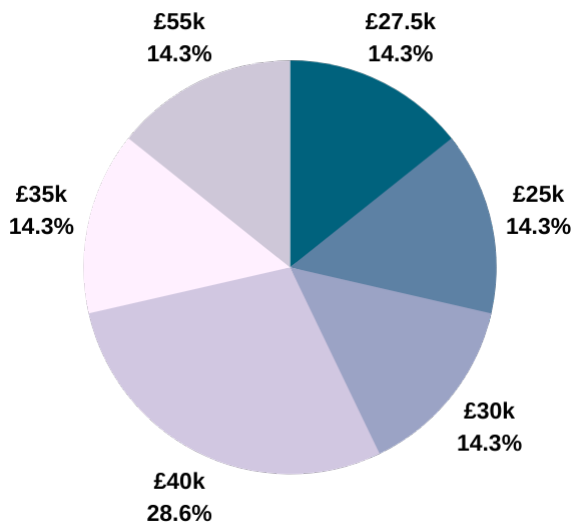


Budgeting for participatory research projects

- **Projects ranged in budget and length, but averaged around £20k for six months.**

Budget breakdown

These budgets are taken from projects that were a year long, with projects less than a year either excluded or a year cost was extrapolated (e.g. six-month project costs were doubled).

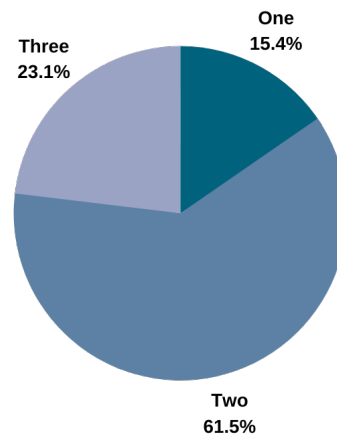


When asked about project costs the most expensive aspect of the programme were:

1. Staffing costs
2. Peer research remunerations and travel expenses
3. Events and catering
4. Report design and communications
5. Many projects had additional costs that weren't factored into the budget, such as additional staff time at different stages of the project not budgeted for.

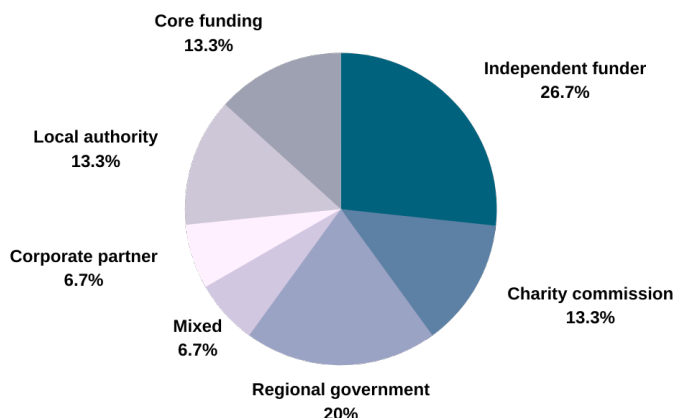
How many members of staff worked on the project?

We also found the number of staff working on projects to be very variable, depending on the project and the stage of the process. Most projects had two members of staff working on the project, though not full time. Projects with more than one member of staff often had specialised roles: with one person leading on the research aspect and one leading on youth engagement and retention. However, these findings were very fluid, as many projects we spoke to saw the number of staff increase during certain stages such as analysis.



How was the project funded?

In terms of how projects were funded, there was actually a diverse range of funding sources. While the majority were funded from independent funders, we also spoke to projects being funded by local authorities, local government (regional), independent charities commissioning, and corporate partners. A small number of organisations also conducted the work without specific funding for it, and utilised core funding or an existing project to conduct the peer research.



How did the peer research approach impact on the amount of time required?

- **Relationships, for recruitment or to interview the right people, took time.**
- **The most time consuming parts of participatory research are common to youth work.**

Relationship building

One of the most vital aspects to the success of a peer research project was that relationships were built and in place before the project started. Firstly, time would need to be invested in building relationships with the young people with lived experience of the topic being researched. Those who already held those relationships could experience a much quicker recruitment phase, but those without would risk not being able to engage a representative group of young people.

I know with youth participation projects that I have done before that I would have said it took more time because good quality engagement with young people; preparing them and training them should take a lot of time.

Relationships would also need to be built with external organisations that could provide access to participants, to ensure a larger sample size or good representativeness in the sample of the research. Those with better existing relationships could either reduce costs, by reducing the need to incentivise participation, or increasing the quality of the research by conducting it in the spaces and places familiar to participants.

There's no point of us starting a peer research project but not having that relationship with the youth clubs that they're going into, or the youth workers that they'll be talking to. We won't be getting the same level of insight.

This was particularly the case when it came to access within schools, or specific groups.

We have underspending through the whole thing, but we found that we needed more time for planning and engagement and relationship building with (schools). That costs us in time more than we had anticipated.

Youth work always takes time

Many organisations spoke about how many of the things that took the most time, were required in any type of working with young people, such as organising times for them to meet, and ensuring attendance at training.

Some of this feels like doing some youth work like when I was a front-line youth worker when I was a 22. Getting people in a room, talking to them.

This especially includes the time taken to ensure that there is regular communication with the recruited peer researchers, from the training process, to the fieldwork, and outcomes. Projects looked to ensure peers were involved and informed at every stage, and thus had to dedicate time to communicating with them through various means.

I think when you have employees and additional staff you need to make sure you have continuous contact and you work together in different ways, so that when there are lags in the project they still feel engaged and know what is going on.

This communication and organisational aspect can be especially tricky for the training and fieldwork stage, having to ensure travel arrangements and attendance of peer researchers to places they might not have been before for certain times.

Surprising challenges are that I've become a full-time travel agent... It's different for every young person, different journeys, taking different times, and being aware of that. I think that was the challenge.

Recruitment and training

Most participants spoke about the recruitment of the peer researchers. Due to the focus on the importance of having peer researchers with the relevant lived experience, it could make the recruit process very long and difficult depending on the scope of the work.

I think it meant that we needed more time because we needed to recruit the two young people and make sure that they were the right young people needed and give them the right induction and support. If you do it right, then it should take longer.

Given the specific criteria and experience needed depending on the project, combined with the perceived academic nature of conducting research, recruitment can take longer than expected for other types of youth programmes.

I feel like the time frames are wrong. They're like, we can do that thing tomorrow, and I have to say we can't do that tomorrow. They wanted the (young people) in place in six weeks. Now we're six months and we've just recruited young people.

Furthermore, on top of recruiting the peer researchers many projects hired in additional capacity to support them, from youth workers to university students. This would require additional time, due to combination of research skills and youth work sometimes needed.

I think the most amount of time is spent at the beginning, at the setup. Am I recruiting the right person who can hold those trusted relationships with the peer researchers?

As well as the recruitment, the training of the peer researchers was also a huge consideration, with projects varying greatly in the amount of time dedicated to this.

...also, the time taken to kind of build them up to deliver the training meetings a long time. We had to space the training over three or four weekends, and then they needed somebody to accompany them with the field work.

Research always takes time

Interestingly, due to many participants not having an experience of non-peer research to compare it to, many of the responses focused on aspects of the general research process. Aspects that exist outside of a peer research approach such as securing access to focus groups, transcribing audio files, analysing the data, and writing the report, would be very time and resource intensive.

For us, it's a lot of back office organisation, like promoting the survey to schools, going out and organising focus groups if that's an approach we're taking, plus anything additional we need to do for those focus groups..... At the other end of the process, there is quite a substantial staff investment in terms of writing the report.

For some of the projects we spoke to, some of the traditional aspects of research were a quicker process as a result of the involvement of peer researchers, mainly in securing access to participants, and disseminating surveys.

“It really is the traditional parts of the research processes that really do take the time, things like ethics considerations and what that looks like. Delivering the research is actually a lot quicker, as if young people are involved in disseminating the survey, they can do that themselves.”

Paying the peer researchers

For the projects that paid peer researchers, this had a significant impact on the resources required for the project.

Part of the reason the cost is high is because we do reward young people for taking part. We do base the reward around London living wage for 2 hours every week for the duration of the programme.

However, some saw the payment of the peer researchers as relatively cost effective. Firstly, due to the positive impact they would have on the amount of data collected.

...they've been able to do ten hours of research each. Which means I think we've got more data than we would have been able to gain if we were doing it ourselves.

Secondly, on the quality of the actual research and from the outcomes for the young people themselves.

“I think it probably is a bit more expensive in terms of the organisation, the transport, and their food. But I think that in terms of the outputs and the outcomes, it is probably more effective.”

Peer researchers as an investment

The projects which involved the trained peer researchers in as many aspects of the research as possible were the ones which managed to see the time and resources invested into them recouped as the process went on.

There was a lot of kind of start-up costs in terms of time, but in another sense, it is minus time because they are producing some of the work themselves and they've been helping us with the analysis, they've been writing some sections of the report.

This initial investment in a well recruited group of peer researchers pays particular returns if the group are engaged post the initial piece of work, either using existing skills and relationships to conduct further peer research projects or by supporting future projects either in a training or facilitation role, or in supporting future cohorts.

..subsequently we have used that group of researchers, the better ones, to do several more pieces of work and, through the experience of doing it with this particular group, their skills across the organisation and peer researchers improved so it was a bit of an investment.

Recruitment



Representation in the peer researchers

- **Getting the right representation of lived experience is critical to the success of the project.**
- **Good representation can vary depending on the project, such as geography or race.**

The most critical aspect for many of the projects we spoke to in the success of their peer research was the recruitment of their peer researchers, and the representativeness of those involved. Like ensuring a good sample in the participants of any research done, the representativeness of the peer researchers who would be involved in designing the research was important. However, given the nature of the work, this can be difficult to achieve.

We had a presentation from a researcher, who was doing a peer to peer research piece, and lots of people were talking about how when you advertise or promote an opportunity like this, it tends to appeal to people who perhaps already have an interest in research. I think one organisation said that they had something similar.... (the peer researchers) came from a more sort of, like, traditionally academic background.

Previous debates about recruitment of professionalised young people also came up, especially when trying to recruit young people who weren't currently involved in some sort of youth voice structure.

We were really keen that it wasn't just the youth council; that it was a diverse representation of (areas) communities. It was really about having those links into the youth clubs, and how we could engage with young people as peer researchers.

It was especially important that peer researchers were also young people who would also benefit from being involved in the process.

We do have a bit more of a focus on those who do not normally have opportunities for participation and are looking for young people who don't have the advantage of a network. We are not opposed to those who do though because we are a mixed (area), so we want to represent the (area) and as an organisation are interested in addressing inequality, we want every voice represented.

Diversity of experiences

Interestingly, more than equalities, the projects we spoke to valued young people recruited from a variety of spaces, places, and educational contexts. Sometimes this was about representing the entire area that the research piece was about or recognising the vast difference in the experience of young people in two neighbouring areas.

The experiences of someone living in (one area) compared to (another) is very different..... We are aware that the experiences of Kurdish boys around one area is a particular experience, and their youth workers have noted that their conditioning is very different to other people in the area.

However, this was less about geographical representativeness, and about capturing a range of experiences.

It was less about geographical diversity, although we did want the young people to come from lots of different places, but we wanted them to come from lots of different experiences. Young people of different genders and transsexual young people, young people who identify themselves in lots of different ways. Young people with experiences of lots of different services, and young people who've experienced CAHMS and mental health waiting times. Young people who've grown up in care, young people who've been adopted, young people from lots of different family set ups. Young people in towns, cities, and rural areas. Young people from the travelling community.

The most important recruitment criteria for many projects was a diversity in lived experiences.

We have a really diverse group of young people who have really different opinions and different lived experiences. Lived experience is really the priority for us, their lived experience is their expertise.

This was partly for some important for ensuring greater access to participants during the fieldwork stage, and that the group of peer researchers recruited would be able to reach as wide of a sample as possible.

They were suitable in the sense that we had people from different schools, different youth centres, involved some people who were working in Richmond. So, the idea that using peer researchers they would have enough scope to reach more people in the borough.

Equalities

Many of the projects we spoke to, except one, looked for a mixed recruitment across race and gender. While many of them were satisfied with the representativeness that they achieved, there were some emerging patterns. Firstly, several projects spoke about difficulties in recruiting white young people.

Interestingly, it has been very difficult to get young white people involved. When I say difficult, they just haven't come forward.

While other projects have struggled to recruit men, and women were largely overrepresented in the peer research teams recruited across projects. This would have an impact on the work itself for one project.

Also, they were all female, there was a boy who came to the first session but didn't come to the rest. Yet interestingly, that's translated to the programme, where there's not as many boys taking part, and I don't know if that's because it was co-created by young women rather than young men, or if they're less likely to take part in arts programmes.

However, for many projects it was not the focus when recruiting young people. One project did not want those involved to be defined necessarily by a single experience or community and did an anonymised process.

It's been pretty much anonymised because we don't expect those young people to have to talk about their own experiences or necessarily feel they have to represent that community. A gay young man from Norwich doesn't have to say I feel like I'm speaking for gay young men in Norwich. The group was very diverse.

While one project raised an interesting debate about the balance of lived experience and their training as researchers, and how not achieving full representativeness in the group of peer researchers isn't necessarily an issue given adequate training.

"...you'll never get representation in all the areas that we're covering but the idea is that, and part of the training, your job as young researchers isn't to bring your own specific experience into the room but thinking about how we can use those experiences to reach more young people."

What was the recruitment process for the peer researchers?

- **Recruitment was mainly referrals, self-selection, or like a normal job recruitment.**
- **Recruitment takes on average a month to two months, depending on the existing networks.**

Critical to the recruitment process for the peer researchers was to ensure that the organisation has good networks and access to reach young people with the opportunity. Reaching as wide of an audience as possible, and different spaces and places can ensure that the peer researchers are as representative of the issues that they are researching.

We just finished the recruit for 2020, we know (the area) and the people working here very well, so we do multiple channels. We advertise generally on social media and through the CVS. We reach out to every youth club and provision we can think of and contact them and ask if there is anyone that would benefit from this opportunity. We also do school assemblies and we also use word of mouth from (those involved previously).

Sometimes the networks can be organisational, or sometimes the recruitment strategy would rest on a single staff member, and the personal contacts and relationship they would have with that area or community.

I use my own network. I've worked in youth work for over 10 years, so I use a network of organisations. I've got over 1100 followers on Twitter, so I put opportunities out there to my followers on LinkedIn, through partners and contacts, or through my network on WhatsApp.

Without these relationships or networks, organisations would find it harder to recruit peer researchers with the lived experience necessary to facilitate a good participatory approach that provides insight into a certain topic.

I think some of the challenges are recruiting from the communities that you aren't even linked into. That's on us not reaching those communities.... there were definitely areas which we weren't already linked into and we didn't have the relationships.

Importance of on the ground recruitment

Some organisations we spoke to would put an emphasis on non-digital, on the ground, recruitment. Advertising the role of a peer researcher in the spaces and places that they wanted to recruit from.

We had paper flyers that I ran around the local area, so shop fronts, GP practices and schools. We had a job description that we sent out to all our contacts and local youth organisations. We put an advert on indeed which wasn't that fruitful.

This could be facilitated easier when a staff member understood the local area or groups that the peer researchers would be recruited from and could effectively reach young people in person.

Our young intern, that was really his role. He visited youth clubs in (the area) and other potential contacts, and through the youth council, and his local insider knowledge of the (area). I think it's the footwork, I don't think we can underestimate his networks, he's a local councillor now.

“And another challenge...(with) some school teachers; they might refer three people from a psychology class because they might be interested and then it’s hard you don’t want to say you can’t do it to any of them.

But equally you don’t want 20% of your peer researchers to be in the same class in school.”

Referring young people

Many projects we spoke to recruited young people that were referred, often by a youth worker or a teacher.

We had like an information event in November where we got people from the statutory and charity sector in (the area) to come along. We told them about the peer research and got them to recommend young people to us that they thought would be suitable, and that could be anything from studying a research based subject to someone they thought would benefit. Then, anyone who was recommended we would have a ten-minute chat on the phone with them to understand where they're coming from and to make sure we had a diverse group, and where they from.

Sometimes this was because the organisation did not do direct delivery with young people and did not have those existing relationships, while other times it was because of the lack of time attributed to recruitment.

We put together two or three proposals on how to recruit young people and went for the one that could happen soonest.

However, there are key challenges with recruiting young people through referrals, with some organisations worried that they would be missing out on young people through this.

We had this information event for people working in (the area) and that was a combination of youth workers, charity workers, and we asked them to recruit people and send them our way, so even in that way we probably missed out on a lot of people who would have been interested by relying on people to refer them to us.

While some organisations worried that the young people that they did recruit, especially through schools, would be unrepresentative. Some projects sought to compensate for this by supplementing their recruitment through referrals with a process that focused far more on self-selection.

We also wanted young people to see those materials themselves and think, okay that's something I'm interested in, and I'll get in touch. So, it wasn't just gatekeeping by teachers.

Yet for certain projects, especially those recruiting peer researchers from specific lived experiences, referrals were one of the only ways that you could recruit.

Then there's a whole extra layer, because of safeguarding. There's not a way we could recruit from them contacting us or signing up on a website.

Normal job recruitment

A few projects found it most effective to recruit peer researchers in a way the resembled a staff post, reviewing applications and having an interview panel. This created a sense that the peer research role was a formal job opportunity, providing it with structure.

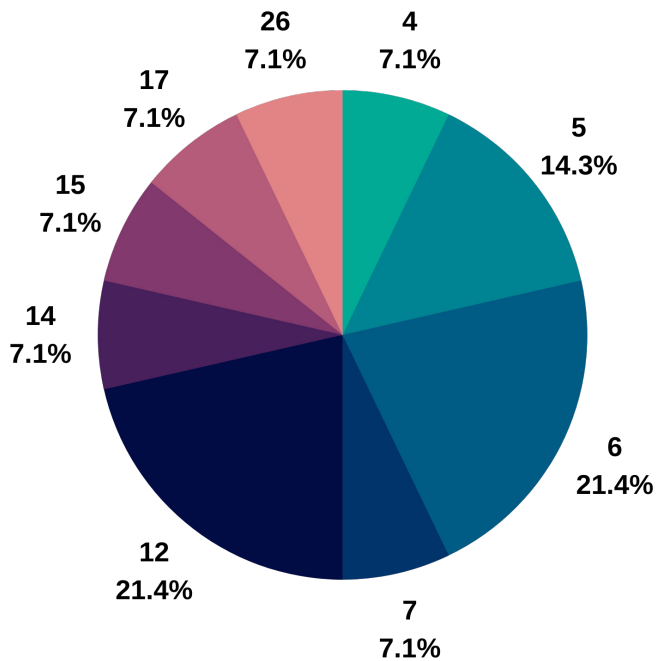
We used the same process as we would for any other post in the organisation, so we advertised it with a job description for around three weeks. We also took up references and DBS, the standard recruitment processes that you would. Overall it took a couple of months.

The peer researcher role would be likened to an internship, or a summer job.

It was also over the summer, and we paid them well. You were able to double up as, are you interested in social change within (the area) and supporting platforms for the voice of young people to be heard, but also, a summer job.

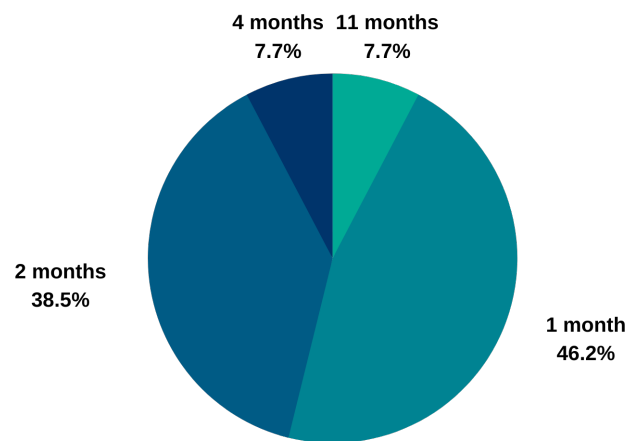
How long did recruitment of the peer researchers take?

Projects that we spoke to took on average around 4-6 weeks to recruit their peer researchers. The length of this depended on a range of factors. Firstly, as previously discussed, was the extent to which the organisation had existing relationships or access to young people that they could recruit from. Organisations that also delivered services with young people found it much quicker to recruit from internal programmes, or if the staff delivering the project had existing relationships with young people that they knew would be suitable for the work.



Secondly, the recruitment process could take longer than average depending on the lived experience and representation of the peer researchers that were needed for the project. For those projects that needed a more specific range of lived experiences might face additional challenges, especially when attempting to recruit young people who are not typically engaged with existing services, or not known to youth workers or teachers. There was a challenge between recruiting an appropriate sample and speed of recruitment.

The number of peer researchers in the different project varied greatly, with the smaller number being 5 and the majority being 25. However, the average number was around 7 peer researchers. Many told us that they believed that they wanted no more than 12 peer researchers, as anymore would be detrimental to the research itself, however some would still aim to recruit more than 12 with some expectation of a drop out rate after initial workshops.



There was no clear preference for number of peer researchers, and the numbers generally depended on the success of the recruitment and how many young people were engaged rather than by design. Very few projects we spoke to have a clear set number to be recruited and budgeted for and were relatively flexible depending on the young people that they had.

The number of peer researchers also seemed to reflect the size and scale of the project. Projects that focused on a single issue, or a single smaller area, tended to have less peer researchers compared to those covering multiple topics or a range of areas. A higher number of young people involved provided more opportunity for the project to achieve representation from a wider number of lived experiences.

Challenges and incentivisation

- **Different young people need different additional forms support, and different constraints on their time.**
- **Competition with rewards can incentivise engagement and increase engagement.**

Time constraints

The most frequent challenge that participants cited was the constraints on young people's time, and how much capacity many of the peer researchers had to do the research and training.

Obviously in a time wise, they're in school, they have other activities and so kind of trying to get them to kind of think about something else can be quite difficult.

This can also be sometimes about timing and trying to conduct a peer research project around other deadlines or exams in the school calendar. Conversations need to be had with them about how it might impact with the other important things in their life.

Trying to have the conversations more frankly early on about how this is going to interact with their other things. If it was at a different time of the year it wouldn't have happened.

Part of managing peer researchers becomes understanding each of their individual circumstances, and the range of existing commitments they have, and being flexible to strike the right balance.

We want to make sure we keep them involved in those stages and it helps in our end as we want them involved with other projects as well, so we do have continuous engagement with them. In those areas it becomes a balance in terms of balancing commitment between those other projects as well as this.

Some projects found that overloading them with things to read or digital communication can actually be counterproductive and having regular face to face time was vital in continuing their engagement and participation. However, this can be very time consuming and depended on an organisation's capacity.

We found that actually sending out information and expecting people to read things in advance is not really the best way to do it. It is more about coming together and looking at things in person together, so having the time for that to make sure we schedule that in.

Ultimately however, young people lead busy lives, and some drop out will be expected. Many projects we spoke to recruited larger groups of peer researchers and trained them in anticipation for this.

"I think it's just about the stage of life that they're at... they're doing their own thing; one is going off to get married, some are going university, one has just got a new child. I don't think it's out of a lack of interest, it's just they're busy and we have to be careful with our demands on their time."

Different levels of support needed

Part of the challenge of working with peer researchers for some projects arose from the variety of needs and additional support some members required. It can be difficult sometimes to track the way in which individual peer researchers are experiencing the process when the majority are benefitting, and the process is working smoothly.

I'm not sure if it was unexpected, but something that has been important to be aware of is the difference in how peer researchers experiencing the research... tracking just to make sure you can support them more in the process and making sure they're enjoying it and learning from it and not getting stressed by it.

Inevitably some peer researchers recruited will be more engaged in research than others, and the experience of the process should be tailored to each individual young person as much as possible to meet their needs. Broadening the range of research methods available or non-research opportunities for them to be involved can help limit this.

And what was unexpected, was the sort of variance. We have some young people who are super, super engaged, and were being very proactive coming up with ideas. And we have some young people who actually were not able to be as involved as they perhaps would have liked.

This is especially the case when the peer researchers are recruited with challenging living circumstances or lived experiences. Training them in research methodology may often be a step too quickly, when some may need additional working skills.

Obviously, lots of these young people have taken a long time out.... We had some people who've kind of been used to a professional environment for several years, but some of them have not ever done any work experience.

Communicating with peer researchers

We found across projects that regular communication was key to keeping peer researchers engaged, from every week to once every two weeks, and on platforms that they were more likely to use. However, many projects found the communication aspect and how to go about it challenging.

I think it's always tough to get young people to always attend. It requires a lot, the relationship that you have to hold, the constant nudging, the constant reminders, the communication. They have a WhatsApp group, but how do you make it regular enough, not imposing, the right tone? Is it a reminder, or is it too much? That I think is a challenge.

One project found that instead of emails, that weren't checked, many of the peer researchers enjoyed using tools like Workplace, which was a forum that they could discuss the research and make decisions ahead of meetings.

They use workplace as a group too. Because we were trying to create a forum for young people to make decisions before they arrive, like food they eat. Currently it's going down a storm, they're all using it. I thought it would fail, but they're using it. I was looking for an online forum that meets our safeguarding criteria and doesn't involve young people having to pay membership.

However, there are limitations especially across a longer project. Many of the projects we spoke to kept the timescales rather short when involving the young people, as it was easier to keep them engaged and communicative over a shorter amount of time.

So, I'd say just that ongoing communication was tricky, because obviously it was a for quite a long period of time. And these young people who like I mentioned, they've got lots going on.

“What we tend to do is give each young person a personalised link and incentivise it as a bit of a competition; who can get the most responses by this date?”

Each week sending an email, or message on WhatsApp or Slack, to summarise the performance of that week so people are encouraged to be responsive and take ownership of that project.”

Incentives

Many projects created an incentive structure for conducting research, to keep engagement after the training had been completed and to increase the quantity of research collected. Through surveys, with tools like survey monkey, peer researchers could compete to collect the most surveys. This competition element is especially effective once the peer researchers have built relationships with one another, and if they have a shared communication channel to talk to each other with.

We don't ever provide vouchers except for the competition element, so we will always say; whoever gets the most survey responses by this date we'll give you a very small voucher, so it tends to be £15 or £20 depending on how many people they get back. That's again, a very small incentive, but generally the young people we engage in the research are interested in either getting the research experience or the issues that we're researching.

There are also ways to incentivise in-depth interviews, though the level of reward for the number of interviews or audio recorded vary greatly from project to project. All incentivise audio time recorded rather than number of in-depth interviews recorded though, as it incentivises better data collection rather than number of participants alone.

But we're not being strict on time, if someone had done 20 and in a bit less time than that, we're not going to say you're not getting the money. Each of them would get £100, but with £10 an hour, for ten hours to give them a guideline of how many they should be doing.

"He tried to recruit young people who had a friend, they came together. They were much more likely to join if they came together, and more likely to stay engaged."

Keeping them involved

Projects had different approaches to keeping the peer researchers involved, from the recruitment to during the meetings themselves. One of the key ones was to create a sense of community and build those relationships through sharing meals and eating together.

We know everyone knows that people like to eat food, but just having a lunch break and a nice meal, and the emphasis they put on it, to sit down as a group and have conversations around food. Almost making a community over a meal.

While financial incentives can be effective and getting young people involved in the initial stages, it is less effective as the project goes on, and actually the dynamics of the group and that sense of community becomes more important.

I think the reward helped keep engagement. What they said to us is that it was an incentive to get involved in the first few weeks, but after they enjoyed coming to the meetings. It was more the experience, and some of them talked a lot about it feeling like a family.

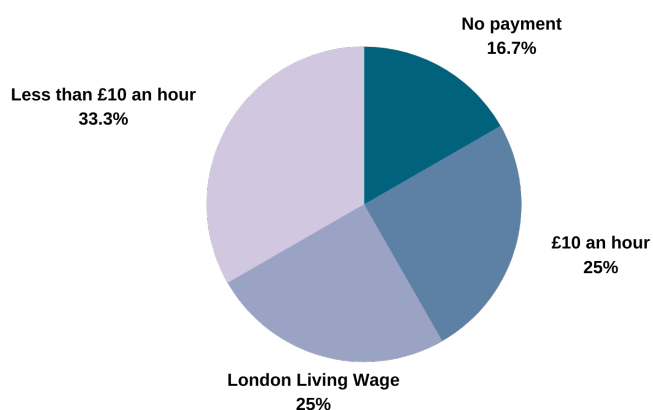
One way that this was fostered through the recruitment, like one project did, was to recruit peer researchers in pairs. This way young people could come with a friend, and it would make initial sessions more accessible.

Challenges and incentivisation

- There is a lack of clarity on when and how to remunerate young people.
- Vouchers are often used to reward young people to avoid complications around benefits they might have.

Paying for participation

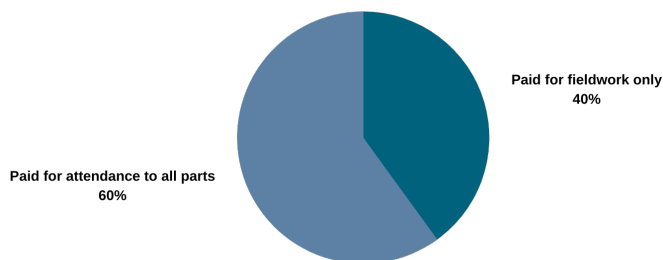
Around half of the projects paid around £10 an hour, or London living wage. While around a third ended up paying less than £10 an hour, greatly varying in amount. Only a couple projects did not provide a form of payment for the peer researchers.



Those who paid less than £10 an hour tended to see it less as payment, and more as a thank you for taking part. Preferring to give a small cash or voucher reward, in a round number like £50 or £100, at the end of the process. Those who did usually ended up providing less than £10 an hour.

In these projects, financial remuneration was not seen as a wage, and there was not a clear expectation that the peer research role was a paid one, simply voluntary. As such, it might be slightly unfair to compare it to those paying £10 an hour or more, as it was a very different approach to the question of financial reward.

The most interesting difference for the projects was when they decided to remunerate the peer researchers for their time. Nearly half of those deciding to only pay peer researchers for the fieldwork stages, and just over half paying them for all their time involved in the project including training and initial introductory workshops.



I'm fully aware that the staff present are being paid for their time there, and we have one young person who is a parent who having ad-hoc work can be really challenging for her. It's about supporting her in a way that would be good for her, like covering childcare costs for the three days when she's away. In our original form, we put that for recruitment, do you need any additional support to get involved?

Remunerations

Many peer research projects paid their young people, but the amount that they paid them was incredibly inconsistent. For some projects, the resource cost was far higher because they paid London Living Wage for both the training and fieldwork.

We pay them London living wage on an hourly basis which is £10.55 an hour for everything they are involved in.

This was only the case in a minority of projects we spoke to however, with some also paying £10 an hour, and a significant number paying less than £10 an hour. For the projects which paid £10 rather than the London Living Wage, it was usually due to payment being in the form of vouchers.

They were paid £10 an hour, for ten hours. We're giving them each £100, and we explain that to them as £10 an hour for ten hours of research, 20 interviews around half an hour each.

A significant number of projects paid less than £10 an hour, usually also through vouchers. Usually this was done as a reward, or a thank you, for their participation at the end of a phase or the process rather than linked to hours spent.

We're going to pay them in vouchers. We don't pay them an hourly wage for doing this. They're probably doing about 8 to 14 hours and they'll get a £50 voucher at the end of it.

There was also a lack of clarity from organisations about whether they should be providing payment for the training, the fieldwork, or both. This usually depended on how much training was provided for the peer researchers, and how much additional support unrelated to the research project was available, such as employment support. Many expressed a hesitation, even though that provided payment, that it might change the motivations and intentions of those taking part.

No not for the training. I think that the idea was we wanted people to get involved who were really invested in the research and also to give people a chance, so the idea of having two training sessions so that people could come along and get a sense of it, and see if they wanted to do it.

Projects that did not pay, but rewarded participation, did provide additional support to improve access to the research project for participants in the form of travel usually.

We reimbursed their travel, to get to the sessions. Then it was remuneration for their time, being at the session, so if they came to that session, they got the voucher. It was £40, for coming for the day. It was 10am, to 4pm, and there would have been a break for lunch together.

One project argued that payment was an important thing to do, to address the power imbalance between the organisational staff and the young people, an element that the research approach was designed to address.

“Some of the young people were on various support payments, and then it might have been problematic.

I think it would of seemed like we were contracting them for work, when we weren't, and paying them on a regular basis might have been problematic for their own circumstances.

It was designed so that we weren't paying them for their time, but just a reward for taking part or making up for the price of childcare for attending session.”

No remunerations

Some projects did not pay young people, for a variety of reasons. One organisation felt that the training was an opportunity, and the skills that they would be gaining would be the value that the young people would be getting back.

This was a voluntary position, and we made it very clear right from the outset that it was a voluntary position. We obviously covered any travel that they had, or any other expenses. For any face to face days there was no kind of sort of financial remuneration but what we have equipped them with are a range of skills and experiences that several of them have been able to use.

One project did not remunerate young people, despite initial plans to do so, because when they left the decision up to the young people involved, they said they didn't want to be paid.

“I am keen to remunerate young people, and pay them for their time, and we've budgeted for that. But the challenge was set by another group of young people, they said they didn't want to be paid. My intention is to give gift vouchers for taking part in the induction weekend as a thank you.”

Benefits and vouchers

Most projects we spoke to did not pay young people in cash or bank transfer, opting to use a range of non-cash vouchers. This in part was due to a large degree of uncertainty by the organisations about the impact that cash or bank transfer payments would have.

This fear about the impact of payments can mean that less young people could be involved in the research, rather than more, as a project. The lack of clear advice given to organisations about how they can remunerate those taking part is lacking.

The issue we found were for some is that where they may be been unemployed for a while, in a couple of cases, it wasn't possible to include them because we couldn't give them advice on their benefit situation. One of the researchers we had decided to do on a voluntary basis, it didn't seem to be the best approach. Because then you have some people being paid and then one person not.

Especially when organisations don't have clear information about the young person's circumstance. There could potentially be a wider impact on the household.

One of the main considerations is that people see moving in households where they might be getting social benefit, and we don't want to impact on the benefits of the household. It just meant that it was safer to give voucher because they can purchase something on Amazon that they can use for themselves or for their families rather than cash where it can be problematic.

As a result, vouchers became the most common way that young people were remunerated for their time and effort.

Because for this weekend we don't know everybody well enough yet. It's basically a catchall, one for all, vouchers. Don't put anyone at questions around their benefits, or their tax codes, or loads of questions about what works well for young people being ad-hoc employees is great, if it works well for you.

Process & decisions



Where can young people participate in the process?

- **There is no clear way to measure the decisions that young people make in the research process.**
- **Young people are most involved in designing the method, but less in choosing the methods.**
- **Soft skills hugely improve when conducting qualitative fieldwork, like speaking and listening.**

Research aim setting

The start of the research process, setting the aims and objectives of the research, varied from prescriptive to a more user-led approach. This was dependent on how restrictive the topic that the organisation wanted to explore, or the requirements of the funder. One approach was to have initial, non-participatory, focus groups which helped inform the research aim conversations later or served as a way of recruiting young people into the process.

The initial stage, the focus group, was very much a very traditional social science focus group, with no element of co-design. But then the young people had decided they wanted to be researchers, and get involved, from that process forward it was very much a process of co-production.

For those with clear objectives or themes, initial workshops served as a way of introducing the peer researchers to the overarching objectives of the project, while starting to think about the themes and topics they would want to focus down on.

At the early stage of the project, we had our first face to face meetings, what we called welcome and training day. We explained to them the overarching objectives of the project, and that we really wanted them to help us scope the key themes.

In terms of setting the research aims, different projects took a variety of approaches to this. Some opted to get peer researchers to simply reflect on

their own experiences, as a means of getting some key topics.

When asked to reflect on their experiences, talking about how they experience services, or what impacts on their well-being, that's when (certain topics) started to emerge.

While others took a more structured approach, designing activities to get the peer researchers to think about the topics.

We then asked them to go and write down their thoughts on each of those topics on big A2 pieces of paper. Then we came together again and had a discussion about all the things they wrote down, which was to make sure that the questions were really coming from them.

The most important thing from the initial workshop stage was for the research aims, or themes, to be set by the young people. It was important that young people felt a sense of ownership in the design of the project, rather than being simply co-opted to design surveys or interviews alone.

They really set the direction in terms of what, what they wanted the research to be looking at. There were certain topics that they thought were really crucial. And we made sure to highlight those.

Methodology

When deciding on methodology, most projects had a clear idea of which methods they wanted to use, which usually involved a survey and either focus groups or interviews. In a few projects, the peer researchers did have the opportunity to choose which methodology they would want to use and be taught in.

They had an idea about what methodology they wanted to use, using an (activity) where you use statements and decide which ones are important and which ones are not. The peer researchers got involved with refining those statements, so working out whether they were right, checking on the language we were using and testing out the tools to see they work in a workshop scenario.

However, for most projects with strict timelines and funding deliverables, giving decisions over the methodologies to the peer researchers can largely be impractical. Given the different level of training, time, and analysis needed for each, it would be very hard to put a timescale or budget on a project.

I think (establishing timelines and expectations timewise) is difficult because we didn't know what type of project we'd be doing, what type of methodology we were going to be using. So, it's difficult to navigate that.

Survey design

Most peer research projects we spoke to employ a survey and involved the peer researchers the most in this stage of the research process. However, instead of designing and co-producing the survey entirely with young people, often initial discussions and questions would be formatted into a survey that the peer researchers would provide feedback into.

Some of the decisions that they made were about the questions that we should be asking. And they had a lot to say about the structure of the survey. And so, we completely restructured it based on their feedback.

Peer researchers could also have decision making around other aspects of the survey, such as target audience, and dissemination strategies.

(They) decide where to go to talk to the young people. I had a long list of places where to go and they helped to decided where to go and where to prioritise to spend more time. We worked together to plan the workshops that we delivered to classes of young people.

But their involvement seemed to be most effective when working on an existing questionnaire, and testing it themselves, with a focus on language and accessibility.

Between the first session and the second session we wrote up a questionnaire that we wanted them to use for peer research and in the second training session we got them to go through every question and tell

them if they were happy with it, if it was phrased in the right way, and that was a really productive session because I think we ended up changing every question.

Interviews

Often interviews were conducted, with semi-structured interview guides being adapted from the survey questions. Given the right training however, peer researchers can be provided with more say into the types of open questions and follow up questions they might employ. This is an important part, as they would be the ones conducting the interviews.

I think that involving them in the design of the research materials really meant that we were ensuring that they would only be asking questions they would be happy to ask.

Peer researchers in some projects would also have a say on how they would conduct interviews, and even what equipment they should be provided with, whether it be pens, paper, or recording devices. However, such decisions needed to be accompanied with adequate training in methodology, to ensure that they are fully informed of what the required commitment from them is for each choice.

The one other thing that they had an involvement with was how they wanted to go about doing the interviews, we said they could do it written down on paper, on their phones, and they would rather have it on an online survey.

Furthermore, when designing interview questions, as part of the training, peer researchers were able to test and refine the interview guides by trying them out on each other. As an activity, it would help inform the design of the interview questions, and explore what changes were needed.

They were involved in what that process would look like, and I suppose this isn't, the questions weren't as closed as perhaps they could have been. That young person must have autonomy in the conversation to follow up.

“What tends to happen is the young people we work with go through the headlines, we give them all the data, and make sense of it together. Co-producing the findings.

Then after that we go away and pull together a headline briefing, and we don’t do this in all the projects, but make a snapshot briefing about the findings in the words of young people.

After that, the staff on that project go away and pull together the final report in terms of data presentation and go back to young people to co-produce recommendations for the report.”

Involvement in analysis

- **Projects are not involving young people in the analysis very often.**
- **There are less intensive ways to involve young people in the analysis, by feeding back key findings for discussion.**

Very few projects we spoke to involved peer researchers in the analysis stage, though most found some way of feeding back top level data or emerging themes back to them. The level of engagement and co-production of findings or recommendations remained relatively low. This was partly for two key reasons. Firstly, that the level of additional training and time required from the young people to meaningfully involve them in the analysis was often too great.

I think time, and skills, and skill sets (is why we didn't get them involved in the analysis stage). We've asked them to put their input into a survey link, and it's going to be a case of getting that data off the website, analysing it, picking out the important factors from it. I think that just because there's a limited amount of time in the contract we decided it was good for us to do that bit.

Secondly, many organisations did not have research skills in their own workforce, and thus struggled to provide any formal analysis training like content or thematic analysis. For some, the task of the analysis phase was a huge task, without the additional work of involving peer researchers.

The other thing was around the administrative effort of doing qualitative data analysis for 220 people....it was a significantly bigger task than I appreciated it to be. We didn't factor in what that really meant, probably quite naive in terms of what that actually meant. And there was no way in the scope of the project to be able to cover the staff time to get that done.

Presenting them with key themes

Peer researchers were instead involved in a variety of ways, with the organisation doing the heavy lifting in terms of analysis, and then bringing back the peer researchers to think about what the key findings were.

We were using excel to do qualitative and quantitative analysis. We then talked about how to present some of the key statistics. I asked them, which were the key findings that they thought were most important for us to sort of refocus on.

Peer researchers were often employed to look at transcripts, mainly to pull out interesting quotes, or to look at what parts of the interviews they had conducted were most compelling to them. Sometimes the quotes pulled out could help inform the themes of the findings.

We looked at the qualitative answers, we had like some free text....and they kind of picked through their favourites, they sorted them into themes, which was pretty helpful. So not quite like a tagging exercise, but sort of something approaching that.

In this way young people could provide a steer, or feedback, to the findings. Where they were involved more heavily, such as working through some of the raw data by the organisation, there could be a space to co-produce the findings from the research. The last stage of the process they could be involved with was with the design of the report itself, with some projects involving young people in the writing of the report or providing their experience as a peer researcher.

When it came to write the report, we had a final sort of face to face day. We showed them the draft of the report and they had a lot to say. They were making decisions about structure, about design, about content, and some of the content is actually written by them.

Training



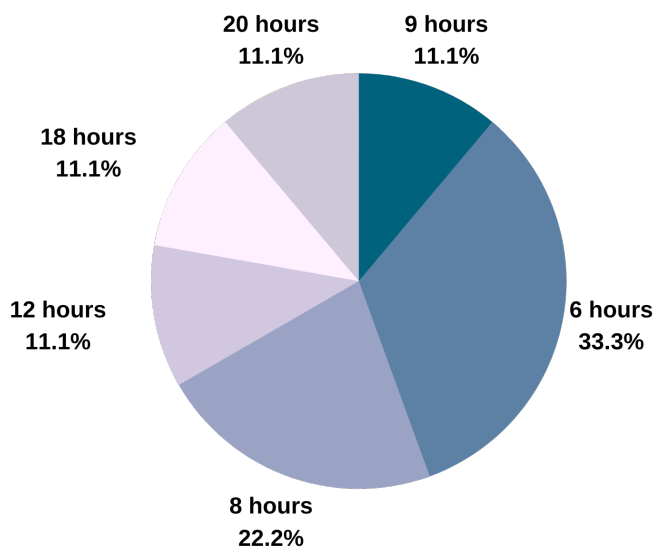
Training peer researchers

- The amount of training varied depending on the amount of participation.
- Training needs to be tailored to young people’s circumstance, specialising roles or by learning digitally.
- Research training focused on qualitative skills like interviews.
- Safeguarding training needs to be tailored to the methods used, and difficult conversations need to be anticipated and dealt with.
- Research ethics, like data protection and consent forms was usually taught practically only rather than theoretically too.

Training programmes varied hugely in length

One of the biggest variations amongst the projects that we interviewed was the training process that their peer researchers took part in. Firstly, this was partly dictated by the amount of time proportioned to the training, which ranged from a minimum of six hours over two workshops to eighteen hours over several months. Some projects opted for shorter, more intensive programmes.

“At the second session we had training on ethics, we talked about safeguarding, safety of the interviewer and interviewee, consent, confidentiality and data protection, and ensuring accuracy, all of those things linked in to ethical and social guidelines.”



Most projects aimed to meet every two or three weeks, for three to four hours, and kept this format past the training stages to have some consistency with the young people across the entire project. However, over longer projects this could become very time intensive.

They meet weekly every Tuesday from 6-8pm. In 2018 we did not have a single week break over 9 months. In 2019 we did build in a few breaks for our own sake as well. We had 4 weeks where we didn't meet spread across the 9 months.

Some projects kept training rather short and concise, involving two or three sessions, totalling no more than ten hours. This was heavily dependent on the amount of the research process they were involved in. Usually, a first session would set out the research and start to formulate interview or survey questions, and a second session to really focus on training them on a method.

Using a staged approach

A smaller number of projects used a staged approach to training, and avoided front loading the young people's engagement with lots of training. This flexibility allowed training to be developed as young people made decisions about what they needed, or about which methodology they were using. It also allowed for reflections during the fieldwork stages.

We did training as and when we moved on to each new stage of the project. So, there wasn't a lot of training (at the start) because we felt that that wasn't something we could able to tailor to the kind of experiences and the needs of the young people."

Staged approaches also allowed flexibility with the recruitment of peer researchers, and enabled young people to join the process at later stages, with the training either repeated in part for them, or specifically aimed at what they would be doing at that stage going forward.

We have further training scheduled in as of and when the programme come online, so we plan on doing more training in the new year. If we recruit new young people, it will be a bit or repetition of what we have done and also new elements depending on the new stage of the study.

Specialising into roles

When recruiting a diverse group of peer researchers, it can't be assumed that they have the same level of interest, or skills, and it can be useful to create different roles for individual young people. Identifying which peer researcher wants to lead on which research method, can give a sense of ownership over different parts of the project, and can allow a more intensive staged research where different peer researchers receive different specialised training pertaining to their role.

We wanted it to be somewhat sort of tailored to their individual interests or the skills that they wanted to develop. There were some people who are undoubtedly more interested in certain elements of the project. We left it up to them to choose how involved they wanted to be at different stages. They all had the same role, but I suppose, the work that they did, varied, particularly with a lot of the work we did was remote.

Digital and distance learning

Research projects which involved wider geographic spread or recruited young people who did not have very much time and found it difficult to attend, used digital tools to widen access and include more in the training. Skype and video conferencing was important, with young people being able to video into training or meetings if they could not make it in person.

We then involved them through Skype sessions throughout the project.

It is important to consult the young people on what communication and digital tools work best for them. One project would film the important aspects of the training and host them online for those who could not make it, or for peer researchers who wanted to review it. Doing this in an informal way, on an iPhone, costs no resources and can really widen engagement.

We asked them how they wanted to communicate, right at the beginning of the project, and they suggested we create a Facebook group.

***“And then we did a whole day on listening,
and how do you construct powerful
questions that prompt reflection?”***

***How do you use a range of questions to
help you open those conversations up?***

***It’s a skilled task to have these kinds of
conversations with people.”***

Introductory session

Many projects started with an initial workshop or introductory day, which was mainly used for recruiting peer researchers into the process by teaching them about the project, the aims, and setting out what was required from them. However, rather than training them in research skills, opening sessions for the peer researchers usually focused on team building, communication, and context.

...on the Saturday we've got an outside provider who is doing some group, team building stuff...they're twelve young people who've never met each other before, working on high level projects, so being able to communicate as a group is important.

The second aim for opening sessions, other than setting out the research process, was to provide context. It was important to clearly state why this project was happening, and what the need is that they're trying to address.

The first stage is about team building, alongside what is the community in (the area) like and what is life like for young people in (the area). All of them will be (local) residents, and know how the area is like but they won't have the data for example.

Research training

The bulk of training provided to the peer researchers revolved around research, and especially how to conduct research. A few projects, with more time, would begin with a wider induction into research, on why we use it, and why it was important. While some would provide a training list over to peer researchers for them to choose what they learnt.

Our head of learning and development is doing some stuff around participation, enabling participation, and what does it look like? Then we've got a section on the Sunday morning which we've called a training menu, and we ask young people on what they want us to deliver.

However, the bulk of the training revolved on teaching peer researchers' different methods, and how to conduct qualitative research in a variety of ways. Peer researcher's time in face to face sessions tended to focus on their decision making and co-production of the research process, with training being focused far more on specifically the methods that they would be using.

So we would give them some concrete training on social research, training on how to do interviews, how to introduce the research, how to talk through the consent form, how to deal with difficult people in an interview, and what to do if a sensitive topics came up.

It was difficult to understand fully what training around in-depth interviews always entailed and, given the amount of time given to training, not all projects would have enough time. Important aspects such as building rapport, and follow up questions, can be quite difficult to teach quickly and were more likely to come during the fieldwork phase with reflection.

It was giving them an insight to different research methods and seeing if they would be interested in using any of them during the project... We were guided by the objective and making sure they felt they could do a good job, credible as researchers, and we felt we could get good data and insight without making it credentialed or getting them involved in the more academic or intellectual side of research methods which can be quite dry. We were goal orientated.

One project we spoke to align their training programme in line with an AQA award which they had written, this allowed the young people involved to receive an AQA award level 3.

For the young researchers themselves we always award an AQA award. We've written our own AQA unit called being a peer researcher. Any organisation could use it for their own project...So, it's something that's tangible as a research led qualification, which is great for some students who don't get that at school.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding, while essential in a youth work context, can have new meanings in the context of training young people as peer researchers. There is a lack of understanding about the additional risks that young people may encounter as peer researchers, such as re-traumatisation through having to handle sensitive issues.

...making sure they have a debrief after sessions should something that comes up in a session impact them, because it brings up their own personal experiences.

There is a risk that peer researchers, conducting qualitative interviews with participants, are being asked to relive their previous challenges through difficult conversations that might arise.

The other thing that my colleague said she would improve on is supporting young people even more with some of the more challenging conversations that they may have.

Preparing peer researchers in the training about how to approach difficult conversations is not just to reduce risk to the participants, but also the researcher.

The level of supported need for the peer researcher is quite significant because of the risk of them being re-traumatised some of the stories that they will be exposed to so obviously we need to do quite a lot of work to protect that to safeguard them.

One way to avoid this was to build in safeguarding training around interview and focus group contexts, with activities designed to help peer researchers identify signs of distress and having clear strategies to navigate or end the interview. Additional support for the peer researchers can be outlined from the beginning, so there is a clear point of contact for support.

Young people were invited to talk to the director and (staff) about what the role would look like. The idea being that we would have (staff) buy in from the beginning, so that the young person's personal and professional development was their responsibility...

so they outline that they were the point of contact for support.

Some projects we spoke to did include in their training how to speak to vulnerable groups, however this wasn't the case with many projects.

We also did things around issues such as safeguarding and confidentiality and other practical things you need to be aware of, especially as a researcher working with vulnerable young people.

However, these contextual safeguarding issues arise depending on the methodology chosen. One project did not provide ethics and safeguarding training, but mainly because they weren't going to do face to face interviews.

We touched on it. We didn't cover it a lot. I must be honest. And we didn't have them conducting kind of face to face research. And so, you know, they weren't kind of holding focus groups.

There are also additional issues arising from the interactions that peer researchers may have depending on the space they interview in.

I think it presented a whole load of issues around risk assessments and how you keep a team of researchers safe when they're out and about. One of our researchers had a little safeguarding incident where someone that seemed to be a little bit unstable stuck their fingernails into his hand when he went to shake their hand.

One project would use peer researchers to conduct the bulk of the research but used members of staff to conduct interviews with vulnerable groups to avoid putting young people in difficult situations.

We decided that with the peer researchers we didn't want to be putting them in uncomfortable or sensitive subjects, and told them it's part of a bigger project, and part of it we would use our own interviews and things with vulnerable groups which covered the worry that we might not be reaching certain people.

“The level of supported need for the peer researcher is quite significant because of the risk of them being re-traumatised some of the stories that they will be exposed to so obviously we need to do quite a lot of work to protect that to safeguard them.”

Ethics

Compared to safeguarding, ethics training and research ethics were less common among projects that we spoke to. Often organisations would take responsibility for basic ethics and consent requirements, such as forms.

The consent and ethics I mostly lead on that stuff. In my head I had a sense of division of labour, that I did all the admin, all the relatively boring stuff and they do all the front-line engaging stuff because with consent.... Looking back, I could have involved them more in that.

Partly this was because those we spoke to found research ethics difficult to teach in an engaging way to young people, and that practitioners lacked interesting approaches to teaching research ethics to young people.

I remember going into the research sessions thinking in my head "this is so exciting, I really love learning all about that stuff myself" and then when I was actually going through the ethics training, a lot of the young people felt like it was just a lecture. I would change how I would do the training for that stuff and make it more interactive.

One way that they could be better engaged on ethics was from group activities and finding engaging ways to teach ethics to young people in a relatable way.

We did a session about different research terminology and research ethics. They had to identify the right definition and we then discussed what that was and what the implications were. We did a lot of group sessions around confidentiality and the various aspects and shared the research ethics from the study with young people.

However, where ethics training might exist, there was still a danger that young people who missed the training session may continue in the project, meaning that ethics was not viewed as essential in the same way that safeguarding might be.

Ethics and consent were covered right at the beginning of the project through that

welcome day. Not all the young people were able to attend, we had, I think nine out of 14, and for the remaining I offered a sort of condensed version of the training through Skype. But to be honest, not all of them were able to pick that up. There was one young person he wasn't able to have that training, but we still wanted them to carry on and continue with the project.

Limitations of training

However, we found that even with training, there were still limitations on the level of work that peer researchers could be expected to perform, depending on the methodology chosen. Especially when recruiting young people with specific lived experiences, for training can be inadequate.

Expectation was a bit difficult. Looking back on some of the peer researchers, I think some of them, even after doing two days of training...to go out and have conversations with people that haven't done it, (without) practice is a bit challenging...It required a lot of support and organising to keep the peer researchers together and active and actually doing it effectively.

While training could cover the basic mechanics, the amount of time needed to develop interpersonal skills to the extent that they would be confident speaking to strangers, about difficult subjects, is too great for the timescales given. Some projects we spoke to would identify a peer researcher with those existing skills to take on harder pieces, like focus groups, while some projects would notice a difficulty when in the field.

I think some of the challenges were actually around those interpersonal skills....If I was to ask you a powerful question and you weren't comfortable answering, then you might want to jump in before it had time to think and respond. I've noticed that happening with the peer researchers...that they're not comfortable with silence.

Part of the challenge that organisations face is that, if truly user-led, the research process can require a extensive list of skills for a young person with limited time to have to learn. As a result, often projects we spoke to would cover an array of topics in a short

Impact



What were some of the benefits of involving them?

- **Depending on the level of involvement, and methodologies chosen by young people.**
- **Understanding of how decisions are made, and the role of research in influencing those.**
- **Soft skills hugely improve when conducting qualitative fieldwork, like speaking and listening.**
- **Research skills, especially when involved in the analysis stage.**

Across the different projects there were a range of benefits for the young people involved, usually depending on the research process and the extent of which they were involved.

The different phases of the project, the planning, research and launching the reports had different benefits at different points. Presentation skills and communication skills and facilitation were key within the research itself because it was mainly presenting to young people and engaging with them. Also, generic research skills in terms of designing good research questions, building reports.

As well as the skills fostered in training, regardless of the intensity of length of it, the peer researchers would expect to gain a lot of benefits through conducting research. Through practicing in-depth interviews with each other, many of them would improve their inter-personal skills.

In terms of confidence, some of them were quite quiet, but by the end, when they were doing practice interviews with each other, they would talk to people they didn't know in the group. So, from the training we could really see it, and hopefully by the end of the project we can see that things have really improved.

What was striking to many organisations was the speed of improvement for many of the young people involved, especially depending on the extent to which they were conducting fieldwork, which could take them out of their comfort zone.

What we found interesting is that through doing this, you could quickly train, recruit, retrain and see marked improvements... in a really short period of time. Seeing how they overcame their adversity, seeing how they challenge themselves, seeing how they pull together, seeing the solidarity they had.

This is partly due to the range of opportunities available to them during the process, from research skills, to listening to interviews, and even after the research is conducted. Many peer researchers would continue after the report phase to take the findings forward to decision makers. Having a sense of ownership over the process, and then advocating the findings, can give those involved a strong sense of agency if done right.

Once we did the launch there was a lot of public speaking to senior decision makers and a lot of high-level meetings. We went to meet with the Mayor, so those types of conversations inevitably involved negotiations and debating. It's about confidence and building their sense of agency to build legitimacy and power and they can own that so they can be self-assertive.

Lastly, one of the longest lasting benefits for the peer research process was the friendships that are created between the young people involved. Many of them, meeting for the first time, remain in contact with each other past the project especially when the research and recruitment speaks to a shared lived experience that they have.

I suppose I should have expected this but the friendships made as a result of being involved. Some of them I think, have made lasting, lifelong friendships.

Interview with Young Peer Researcher for the Young Women's Trust report

How did you find interviewing other young women about their unpaid work?

I found it brilliantly interesting but also really sad, it opened up my eyes of just how extensive this women's unpaid work issue is. I thought I was one of few young women who had the responsibility of unpaid work, but it made me realise I'm not alone. During this Peer Research project, I've become increasingly interested in how research is conducted, how data is compiled and then used to raise awareness or make change.

Do you think the young women you interviewed were more open/honest because they knew you were also a young woman with similar experiences? How could you tell?

I felt that they could relate to me more, we were equals and understood the difficulties I was interviewing about. I wasn't some stranger in a white coat asking questions about something that I didn't have any lived experience or personal knowledge on. At times I could provide small snippets of "I know what that's like," or "I've been in that situation" which I hope comforted the young women.

What was the most interesting or striking thing you heard? What do you think were the main themes coming up from young women?

Young women not knowing what they were going to do after having a baby, not having a plan for childcare or not getting able to afford it & being stuck in a viscous cycle. Women seem to do the greater share of both childcare and housework, along with seemingly all the emotional support within the family network. There was a lot of pressure from older family members to carry out gender specific tasks such as women to clean and cook, while men did gardening or DIY. Universal Credit and having a driver's license/ having access to a car came up a lot, too.

What did you learn or gain yourself from being a researcher on this project?

I was worried about talking to the young women but opening up about such personal topics & talking in a free, safe environment really boosted my confidence. I realized that I was quick thinking and good at asking the right questions, I work well in that sort of situation. It has ignited an interest into how research is carried out & why, which I don't think I'd have developed without this project.

Are there any ways you think we could make the process easier or more effective for future peer research projects?

I think doing peer research over the phone helped the young women to open up, not being face-to-face they seemed to talk really freely about their experiences that they might have been too shy to do in real life. The script was a brilliant resource and I used it every single time as a guideline to get me going & a reminder of certain things. A little more feedback on my interview technique (the call recordings) would've been helpful.

How did you measure the benefits for the young people?

- **Evaluation forms were the most common way to evaluate the progress of the young people.**
- **Some projects did not do an evaluation of the young people, focusing on the research outcome instead.**

Qualitative evaluation

Around half of the projects we spoke to use some form of structured qualitative evaluations. The most common type was sit down reviews and supervision, and end of project evaluations. This was partly due to lack of time or resources to design up a more complicated evaluations process to track their progress.

I did quite a regular review with (the peer researchers) through the project and it was very qualitative, so I think it was a mixture of expediency and wanting to have honest conversation with them to make sure it was beneficial for them through a qualitative conversation as opposed to putting numbers on things, which is because we did not go out to prove anything necessarily. We did not want to do anything that felt too paperwork heavy or numerical or monitory. It was a mixture of preference and not being necessary.

An informal conversation about what skills the young person wanted to develop, and then tracking their progress through the different stages was a way that came up. This co-producing of outcomes with the peer researchers themselves made the benefits that were being tracked more relevant to the young people's aims.

We did lots of qualitative evaluation and asked them lots of questions in the beginning such as what they want to learn and get out of it, what skills they want to develop and then we checked with them halfway through and then at the end as well. We are now also contacting the young people from the first cohort in 2018 who we can get in touch with and ask what sits with them from the experience and what they have used from that in interviews or so on.

“We did course evaluation forms. And I think what we have developed, again over the last two years is our evaluation tools. What we’ve noticed then is that though there was a lack of tools. We didn’t have we didn’t have like an organised systematic approach of tracking distance travelled, case studies, all that sort of stuff for this kind of project. However, we do have that now.”

Evaluation forms

The most frequent evaluation tool used were evaluation forms, though there was a lack of consistency on how they were applied. Some organisations would do an evaluation form at the end of the research phases, some at the end of the training in total, some after each training session.

And then after each face to face day, we had evaluation forms, which we've used and to be honest, like the evaluation is still the thing that I want to work on.

Furthermore, evaluation forms were more vital for the training aspect and in some cases the young person's evaluation in the fieldwork stage dropped to informal reflection sessions. Yet some of the peer researchers will experience the most benefits and improve their skills the most likely in the field rather than in the training sessions. Given the time, resources, and complexity of a peer research project often evaluation can be difficult to systematically implement.

Before and after evaluation

A small number of projects used evaluations to do a baseline study, to track their progress at the end of the project compared to at the beginning. However, this can be difficult in a peer research context depending on the decisions the young people make, as it is difficult to predict exactly what you will be looking to improve over time, depending on the methods employed.

We did do some evaluations; we did a baseline of before and after. I think this was fine, there was issues with it in terms of the types of questions we were asking, we find this often as an organisation, that you were just more presumptuous at the start about the things they don't know. We also did a conversation with the facilitators to reflect on the sessions, and that was meaningful evaluation I think then a form and a scale of one to ten, which I don't think adequately reflected their experiences.

Yet a simple survey done at the start of the project can help provide a great evaluation at the end of the project.

At the beginning of the project, we asked them to fill in a survey, and we asked them to kind of rate their skill. We're hoping to have not just a measurement at the end, but we'll be able to kind of compare it to where they were at the beginning.

No evaluation

Yet for a large number of projects, there was no clear evaluation process throughout the project. Interviews with peer researchers as the worked finished, but it was not always something that was built into the project from the start.

No, we didn't do that, and I think that would be something definitely to do in the next project, tracking from the first session to the last. But we will definitely do something at the end, like a feedback survey but I think if we could of done that in the first session that would have been really helpful as well.

Due to participatory approaches being less understood, especially in the ways that they're increasingly being applied, the focus around evaluation can be placed heavily on the project itself, the outcomes, the research quality, and the quality of decisions made. As a result the benefits for the young people involved can sometimes be a secondary consideration.

We're doing an evaluation for the project. But I'm not sure about the panel, though. It doesn't actually come up yet to be honest.

What was the impact of the peer research approach on the quality of the research?

- All respondents spoke about research having increased authenticity and credibility.
- The qualitative data collected was better, with young people speaking more openly to peers.
- Design of the survey or interview questions is improved with their involvement.
- Sample size is increased using the young people's networks and reach in their communities.

Authenticity

When speaking about the impact of the peer research approach on the quality of the research, the most common word used by those we spoke to was authenticity. The research was more authentic and felt more legitimate as a result of their involvement.

It feels more authentic, then just something that's come from statistics or our research. It comes from young people themselves, and they have ideas that we think we would not have come up with.

Some projects spoke about authenticity in relation to the findings of the research, and the difference in that which the young people as peer researchers found.

Young people, as peer researchers, definitely makes the research more authentic. I mean, some of the information that we've got is not what you'd probably get from young people if they were speaking to adults. Because some of the barriers...it takes longer to build relationship. It's kind of the trust aspect of it.

For some projects the sense of authenticity was less about the quality of the research itself, but the effectiveness of that research in creating change, and the confidence that policy makers had in taking things forward from it.

Had they not been involved; my sense of legitimacy and credibility would have been a lot less. I would have been more hesitant, and doubtful.

Perspective

Throughout all aspects of the research process, the key element that projects cited as improving the quality of the research was the unique perspective that young people brought. In particular, how different the project might have been without their involvement.

The young people become the experts because they have the lived experience of what they're talking about, and I think that's the difference from using adults.... We did a piece of research that was done by some master students, and the report compared to the information that we've got from the peer research, it's so different because they were coming at it from a completely different point of view. It seems very sterile, like very clinical and the young people's research seems so alive.

This was especially the case when young people are involved in the writing or the design of the report itself and can have an impact on how information is presented. Their perspective can improve the accessibility and authenticity of the report.

And in terms of the report itself, it's so much more engaging, We took a lot of time to ask them about presenting research, what has the most impact, and not just in terms of like writing the content, but actually the design. I think the final report is just a much higher quality.

Better qualitative data

These same strengths carried through to fieldwork, with projects reporting that the peer research approach improved the quality of the interviews that were conducted. Most frequently, organisations spoke of better, more honest answers from participants who were willing to talk about things that they might not have felt comfortable talking about to an adult.

It was about the quality, I think. The ability of the young people to really connect with the people they're talking to... we were talking about things that they would not have felt comfortable speaking about in front of those adults.

In some cases, this was due to the ability of peer researchers to obtain a higher level of engagement from participants than a member of staff might have been able to.

When you are doing focus groups and workshops, and you need the respondents to be engaged and enthusiastic. If it had just been me doing all of it, then it would have been to a significantly low degree. I back myself to a reasonable extent to engage young people but having peer researchers helped massively with the engagement bit which improved the data.

This in part, can be explained down to some commonality of language and reference points. Some peer researchers we worked with would be able to pick up on certain terms, or pop culture references, that often alluded to serious points.

And also some of the language is can be quite challenging, but with the young people, they were able to cut through those things.... it was just back and forth in this session, and the it was very engaging and very in depth, and the conversation just flowed.

But largely it was down to the shared lived experiences of those peer researchers, coming from the same neighbourhood, or background, or having experience of the same challenges. The commonality they had with participants meant that they would ask better, more relevant, follow up questions and build a better working rapport.

The ability to engage with other young people, and that common ground, just I'm 16 too and I get what you're talking about, rather than someone coming in and is not living the same experience, I think that makes a big difference.

Question formulation

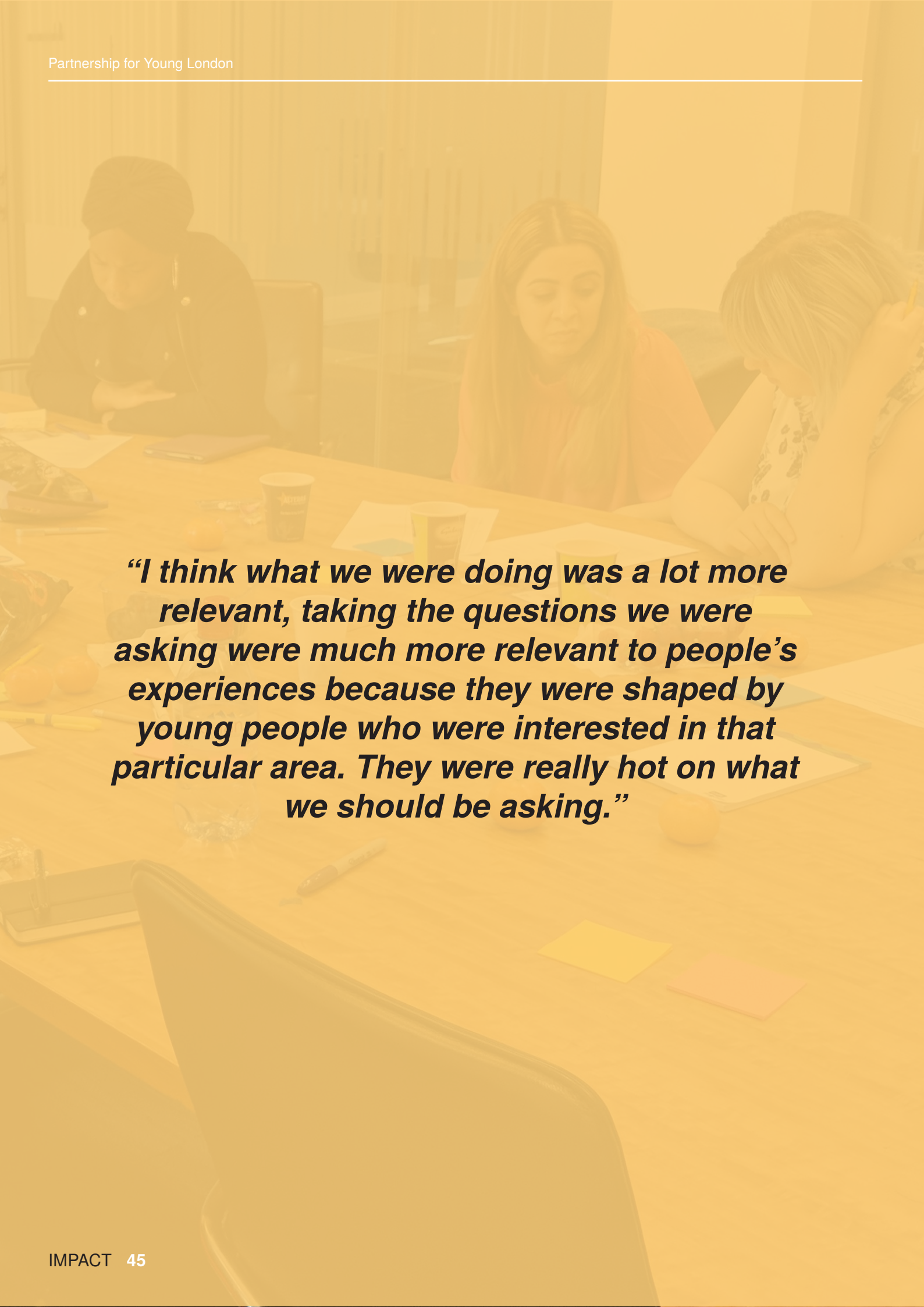
One of the most common ways that peer researchers were involved in the research process was in formulating the questions for either the survey or interviews. The positive impact mainly revolved around the ability to change language, and bring a different perspective to make the research materials more accessible and relevant.

It made sure that it was worded in a non-pretentious manner, and a way young people can understand, respond to and resonate with. They shaped a role in the way the direction of the conversation went in.

In many projects it was cited that there were questions included that would not have been without the input of the peer researchers, and that their input into this was invaluable.

Simply because I think if we wouldn't have asked the same questions.... They helped us completely restructure it. I mean, we could have done this project without them, but I don't think we would have got the results that we did.

Not only did the questions get changed, and the language tweaked, but their involvement in the design of the questions meant that research was more relevant to the lived experiences of those who would be asked.



“I think what we were doing was a lot more relevant, taking the questions we were asking were much more relevant to people’s experiences because they were shaped by young people who were interested in that particular area. They were really hot on what we should be asking.”

Better sample

One of the most significant impacts on the research quality through the involvement of the peer researchers was their ability to get a more diverse, and larger sample size for the research. When conducting interviews in the field, peer researchers were able to reach a more diverse group of people in the community.

If you had lots of people that were outside of that group doing the research, I don't think you would have reached the same people. I think that's also potentially part of the issue.

But even within school settings, peer researchers recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds could reach the normal participants who might self-select to take part in a less participatory approach.

(They will) get in touch with people who wouldn't otherwise be part of the research. Say we went into a school and wanted to interview with people, we would maybe get a certain group, but with young people they would possibly get contact with different people.

“We got a much higher response rate to our survey, than previous surveys that we've run, and I feel quite sure one of the reasons is because we have the young people promoting themselves, not just in their networks. We kind of gave up power in the sense that we didn't write the materials ourselves, we got them to write them with our support.”

Even with survey responses, projects found that peer researchers could garner a higher response rate and a more diverse sample of respondents. This was partly through their own personal networks, but also in the way that they designed the materials.

We got a much higher response rate to our survey, than previous surveys that we've run, and I feel quite sure one of the reasons is because we have the young people promoting themselves, not just in their networks. We kind of gave up power in the sense that we didn't write the materials ourselves, we got them to write them with our support.

Getting the peer researchers to help design the survey materials, and the advertising, added a sense of authenticity to the research which would help promote a higher response rate. Respondents seemed more receptive to take part in something that was designed and pitched by the young people involved.

They were helping us with sort of promoting the survey. They were sharing it themselves in social media within their own networks. We have sort of an external social media post, and we got them to write the post to themselves, and it was very much them saying, 'Oh, this is a survey that we've created. we'd love it if you could fill it in.'

What was the impact of the peer research approach on the quality of the research?

- **Having to recruit a representative group of young people can mean organisations have to build partnerships and increase reach.**
- **Giving decision making to young people can ensure the independence of the research and organisation.**
- **Young people involved in the research can be powerful advocates for the findings when campaigning for change.**

Organisational change

The peer research process was also found to have some benefits for organisations, beyond informing strategies or how they conduct research. Some changes were small, such as the way that organisations used language and communicating to the young people that they support.

We learnt in the sharing evening that there was some terminology that we use that means nothing to the young people. That's part of one of the outcomes of this, if we want to build relationships with them as a sector.

The research process itself could also bring benefits to the organisation, such as during the recruitment phase where building relationships was vital. Having those links in the community and with external organisations can be impactful over time. This can be a challenge at first, especially with engaged non-youth organisations, but is important to maintain these past the project.

One of the general practical issues we have had as a whole is that because it is a partnership between many different organisations as well as involving young people who do not work for those organisations, the logistics of organising things can be a bit tricky.

The research process also can push organisations out of their comfort zone, handing over the process to young people, and not having an idea about what would come up. It becomes a trust exercise between the organisations and the peer researchers and the process.

For us, it has pushed us out of a comfort zone. They have asked questions that we perhaps don't ask. Also, we have learnt how much we can trust young people in the community and that they have wise heads on their shoulders and are really thoughtful and do a good job.

Lastly there was a sense that fully user-led peer research can bring innovation and change and having young people's voice in the decision-making process around strategy in a meaningful, and researched, way can have impact.

I think we have a lot of people who love working with young people, and work passionately for young people, but have always done it in one way. I think young people's involvement can bring innovation, change, and shaping, which is really important if we really want to grow and give young people a bigger say in society.

Independence

There are also several additional benefits to adopting the peer research process to the organisations that conduct them. Firstly, it adds to a sense of the organisation's independence, as they have supported a process in which control has been given over to the young people and that nobody has control on. It sets a standard for the independence of the research itself.

It was a fantastic thing for our relationship building for our community, and we developed our independence, and the independence of our peer research process. It was helpful in setting that.

This can be an important thing to establish depending on the relationships that the organisation holds with the funder, or local stakeholders.

Another one of the challenges is that we had some difficulty with the publication with the report and our relationship with the local authority. Did the report paint a picture of the area that they weren't happy with? So, it took a few challenging weeks of push back for the independence of this report, and the value of it.... I think it is about managing the expectations for all involved, that we don't know what this is going to tell us, from the outset.

“Having young researchers was definitely one of the reasons why it had that impact, because it was young people speaking to other young people who then go to the council. For example, young people are not informed or involved in benefitting from the way the area is changing and you are directly responsible for that as a local authority. If I had said that, and I back myself to be effectively persuasive, but I think a 16-year-old and a 19-year-old would be more effective and potent.”

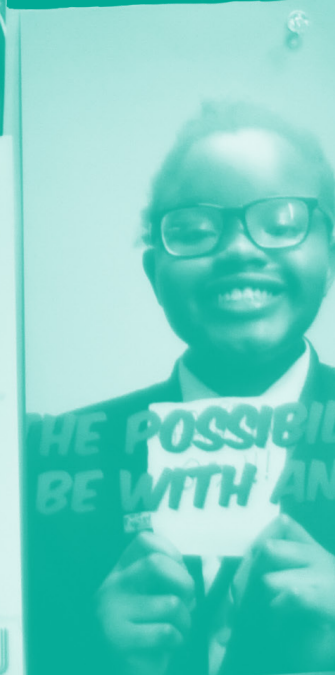
Lobbying and campaigning

Organisations can also find that using a peer research process can improve the impact of the research findings, and the amount of change or funding they can generate as a result. In part this is due to the perceived authenticity of the research, but also we found the projects that were most effective were ones which kept the peer researchers engaged as ambassadors or campaigners. Young people communicating the findings, which they found, can be far more powerful to decision makers.

We didn't factor enough time to do the prep for that, it would have been better if more of the peer researchers were involved in doing the presentation. There seemed to be a degree of anxiety amongst the peer researchers. So, I ended up doing it, but if I could have done it again, I definitely would have supported them to organise to do it themselves.

However, it is not always appropriate for young people to be involved, and it largely depends on the findings of the research being something that young people can advocate to stakeholders. Peer research that evaluates a certain service has less mileage, for example. Furthermore, keeping the peer researchers involved as advocates can take additional time and resources as training will be required on campaigning and communications.

Participatory projects



The following is a small summary of different participatory research projects from different organisations.

- **This is not a collection of projects that spoke to us for this report, but projects that wished to share the work they're doing publicly.**
- **Two projects are an example of participatory grant making rather than participatory research.**
- **We want to thank organisations for sharing information with us for this chapter.**

Youth voice and the meaningful participation of young people in the design and delivery of the work we do is vital. There is a real diversity in the participatory approaches organisations in different sectors are using in their work with young people. The following is a short description of a handful of those, but more is being done in London and around the country.

We hope that the youth sector, universities, and local government can come together over the next few years to share their learning and practice.

Citizen's Led Engagement Project

“The Mayor’s Citizen Led Programme was launched last year to support community-based engagement projects that build relationships and develop civic leadership in communities that currently do not have a voice in City Hall. The programme aims to support communities in telling their own stories, collating community insights and then sharing findings with policy teams in City Hall for these to inform ongoing work.

The table on the following page has been supplied by the Greater London Authority on the projects funded.

The Citizen Led Engagement Programme is currently funding 11 peer to peer research projects.

The organisations we have funded are;

- Hopscotch
- Sista Space
- BlackOut UK
- You Press
- Young Europeans
- Diversity Living Services
- R.E.A.P
- Royal Association of Deaf
- Salmon Youth Centre
- Traveller Movement
- Advance Advocacy

Organisation	Summary	Theme	Area
You Press Farah Mohammoud farah.mohammoud@yopress.org.uk	Research & analysis with BAME communities to gain insight into how they are affected by serious youth violence in their local area. This will build on the findings from the pilot citizen led engagement project You Press were funded to deliver.	Serious Youth Violence	Pan London
Diversity Living Services Ernest Rukangira ernest.rukangira@diversityliving.org	This project will use the following research questions to find effective ways of combating youth violence in the London Borough of Enfield, focusing on parent solutions.	Serious Youth Violence	Enfield
Salmon Youth Centre Amma Appiah amma.appiah@salmonyouthcentre.org	Gathering insights into the attitudes of disadvantaged young people in Southwark towards the police.	Trust and confidence in policing	
Hopscotch Women's Centre Luthfa Khan Luthfa.Khan@hopscotchawc.org.uk	This project will focus on Bangladeshi and Somali population of the Euston area and how they have been affected by the HS2 construction taking place.	Trust and confidence in policing	Camden
Sistah Space Djanomi Headley djan.h@hotmail.co.uk	Participatory action research with African and Caribbean heritage affected by or living with domestic violence in London [focus on Rastafarian community].	Trust and confidence in policing	Hackney
The Traveller Movement Jenni Berlin partnershipsmanager@travellermovement.org.uk	The project will seek to gain insight into the barriers to educational attainment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people in the Greater London area.	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities	Pan London
Black Out UK Rob Berkeley blkoutuk@gmail.com	Enabling 12 researchers who identify as Black queer men to work together on researching other Black queer men, resulting in the creation of a creating a resource which benefits their peers.	BAME LGBT + communities	Brixton, Shoreditch
Royal Association for Deaf People Emma Hampson Hampson@royaldeaf.org.uk	Recruit and support 6-10 Deaf volunteers as researchers, to hold events at Deaf Clubs and other community venues across London and record people's experiences.	Deaf Londoners	Pan London
Advance Advocacy Emily Grant Ashleigh.M@advancecharity.org.uk	Through harnessing the voices of a subset of Advance's Minerva project service users, this project will provide insight into the experiences of young female offenders aged 15-24 and their barriers to accessing health services.	Health & young people, under 25 in the criminal justice system	Pan London
REAP [Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership] Sarah Crowther sarah@reap.org.uk	This project aims to give a voice to refugees and asylum-seekers who do not speak English. They aim to provide an opportunity for them to speak on their experiences and for others to hear them.	Refugee, migrant and asylum seeker communities	West London
Young Europeans [part of the 3 Million] Alexandra Bulat alexandra.bulat@the3million.org.uk	The focus of this proposed project is to assess the impact of Brexit on European Londoners – looking at the impact on college students, lower paid workers, young Europeans with caring responsibilities.	The impact of Brexit on Londoners	Pan London

A New Direction

Website: <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/what-we-do/schools/we-belong>

What is the name of the project?

We Belong

What is the aim of the project?

It's a programme designed to tackle loneliness and specific aims are to build relationships between looked after children and local authorities, connect children in care with each other, and raise awareness of their experiences by giving their voice a platform.

Why did you involve young people in the way that you did?

As an organisation we try to involve young people wherever possible, trying to co-create with young people, and including them in the process.

What are the timescales of the project?

The co-creation was in spring 2019. So, we were funded for a year, but that needs to be concrete by the end of the 2020.

Islington Giving

What is the name of the project?

Islington Young Grant Makers

What is the aim of the project?

Give local young people a voice in shaping their community and having power over decision making.

Why did you involve young people?

In 2015, we had researchers talk to 300 young people out and about in Islington and ask what life was like in Islington for them, what they do in their free time, and what they would like on offer to them. As well as answering these questions young people said they felt they always get asked for their views but never get a chance to decide what should happen. We took that quite seriously.

We decided we wanted to set a young grant makers programme, where we would delegate part of Islington Giving's total grants pot to them and ask them to work through a process of what scheme they wanted, and which projects that applied they would fund.

What is the time scale of the projects?

We are now in our third year in 2020. In 2018 and 2019 the programme started in March of each year and ended in November.



Coram Voice

Website: <https://www.coramvoice.org.uk/>
 (This is a partnership with the University of Bristol is leading the work - direct link about the project
<https://dev.fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk/award/17/108/06>)

What is the name of the project?

LIFT: life in transition for promoting good health in care leavers

What is the aim of the project?

To develop training for personal advisers so that they can better support the health and wellbeing of care leavers and evaluate the impact of that training using peer researchers.

Why did you involve peer researchers?

We are committed to involving young people in the work we do and to give them a voice in our work to recognise them as key experts in their own lives. That is why co-production and peer research are really important to us.

We are in the early stages of the project and peer researchers will be involved throughout. They sit on the project management group and were involved with the initial consultation work with care leavers to develop the training. They facilitated a focus group with young people to look at what help and support they would want from their advisers, to inform the training. Involving the lived experience of young people will make the training that is being developed more relevant. To see if the training makes a difference peer researchers will interview young people's whose PAs have and haven't received the training. We hope that the young people who get interviewed will be more inclined to give peer researchers honest and open answers about their experience and give us more of an insight as to what makes a difference.

What is the time scale of the project?

It is a three-year project finishing in 2022.



Children England

Website: <https://www.childrenengland.org.uk/childfairstate>

What is the name of the project?

The ChildFair State Inquiry

What is the aim of the project?

To help young people to research other young people's experience of our welfare state services and to use that to inform a new vision of how the welfare state could be improved for children and their basic needs.

Why did you choose to involve the children in the way that you do?

We believe that children are the experts on their own lives, so it makes sense that they would be the ones to tell us what services are going well, and which could do better. We have faith in young people to speak for their own issues as researchers and as visionaries for new services. We also very much feel that the current welfare state was designed not with children's rights in mind. If we were going to address deficiencies in the current welfare system, we needed to involve the people who haven't been in mind when it was designed in the 40s. We have a children's rights basis and children's rights would say they need to be involved, they need to participate, and it is nothing without them.

What's the timescale of the entire project from start to finish?

The youth-led section is about a year. We recruited the young people to the core team last October, and we're expecting their involvement until this October.

The logo for Children England features the word "Children" in a purple, rounded font and "England" in a larger, green, rounded font. Below this, the tagline "Charities working for children and families" is written in a smaller, purple, rounded font.

**Children
England**
Charities working for
children and families

Young Women's Trust

Website: <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/unpaid-work>

What is the name of the project?

Valuing Young Women's Unpaid Work

What is the aim of the project?

To understand the scale of young women's unpaid work, what types they do, why they do it, how they feel about it and how it is shared with others in their lives. To explore what expectations young women in particular face from partners, family and friends. We know that although women do the majority of unpaid work in the UK, their value, potential and skills are often overlooked. This project aimed to raise the voices of young women affected by this often hidden issue.

Why did you choose to involve the young women in the way that you do?

The key purpose of the peer research methodology is that young women participants felt comfortable sharing honest responses about their lives, as our peer researchers made clear:

"I think that the women were more open and honest with me because they knew I had been through similar experiences, they felt comfortable in sharing exactly how they felt about the situation and did not hold anything back. I also felt that when I asked why they did unpaid work, they had the same or very similar responses to the ones I had before."

The project also provided a valuable development opportunity for young women to gain research skills.

What's the timescale of the entire project from start to finish?

The peer research, including planning, training, fieldwork and write up was conducted over 5 months. The report is being used as evidence to launch a Young Women's Trust campaign on valuing young women's unpaid work that will continue throughout 2020.



You Press

What is the name of the project?

ROOTS LDN

What is the aim of the project?

Our aim was to carry out an in-depth research & analysis with the BAME community in order to gain an insight on how this community is affected by serious youth violence and crime in London. Our aim was to find out the barriers faced by the BAME community, when it comes to social integration, sense of belonging and their voices being heard with a specific focus on serious youth violence in London. Our aim was to also provide a creative outlet for the community stories, experiences and voices by working with the young and creative researchers.

Why did you involve young people in the way that you did?

What makes our project unique is that it provides an insightful access to valuable data from the BAME community that have been affected by serious youth violence and crime in London and are considered 'hard to reach'. But most importantly we provided an opportunity for the two demographics (young people and adults) from the BAME community to express their concerns and have their voices heard, especially with social integration and youth violence & crime.

What are the timescales of the project?

12 months



YOU PRESS

Participation People

Website: <https://participationpeople.com/>

What is the name of the project?

Dorset Young Researchers, various projects across London.

What is the aim of the project?

Dorset Young Researchers is about getting young people involved in researching the views of their peers on a whole range of different issues. The topic for those young people to research comes from the Local Authority, based on what they want to find out about young people. Often that is as a result of feedback from young people or families, or it's in relation to the youth council's set of priorities in Dorset.

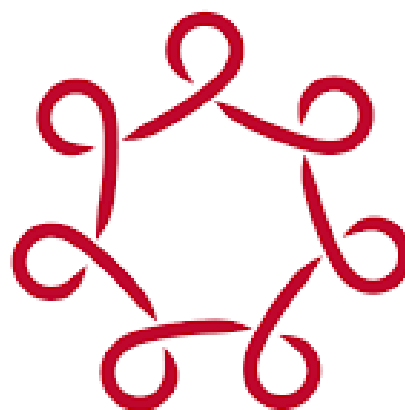
In London, we've done peer research in three local authority levels on different topics. In Greenwich we've just done a piece of peer research on mental health, and young people's experience of mental health support and what could be better. In Hounslow we've just done a piece on knife crime, and young people's views and thoughts on knife crime, and what needs to happen to tackle the issue. We're also about to do something similar of peer research, again on knife crime, in Wandsworth with a view of it developing into a model where the young people work with decision makers after the research to make solutions a reality.

Why did you involve young people in the way that you did?

For us, it's about young people being more responsive to young people than they are to adults. The way that we work as an organisation is to put young people at the forefront of everything we do, we're passionate about young people's voice, it's the only reason we exist as a specialist youth participation organisation. The young research model is a very different way to get young people involved in decision making, and the voice influence agenda by asking young people to help us develop a line of inquiry, to help us develop us questions to ask other young people, develop the analysis, and develop the recommendations out of what we find. With it being all young people doing the research and recommendations, it's just a much more powerful way to communicate the views of young people to the people who need to hear them.

What are the timescales of the project?

Dorset is a rolling project, and we've done it every year for three years, and recruit new young people as peer researchers every year with the lived experience of that topic. The shortest that we've done is around three months, and the longest we've done is year long.



— The —
Participation
 — People —

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Website link: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/what-kick-dust>

What is the project called?

Kick the Dust

What is the aim of the project?

The main aim is to make heritage more relevant and try to embed young people's engagement into heritage sectors and getting the heritage and youth sector to work more closely together. We've got 12 kick the dust projects that range from £500 and a £1m for three to five years, with young people as part of a decision-making panel.

Kick The Dust was named by young people to stir up heritage and literally kick the dust off old ways of working, to challenge heritage organisations to create a more sustainable and embedded offer for young people aged 11-25. A team of 15 young people called the #DustKickers formed part of the decision making processes and helped in deciding which projects received grants.

In total 12 large-scale projects across the UK were awarded grants of £500,000 to £1m for projects running from three to five years long. The projects are partnerships between Heritage and Youth organizations to deliver large scale ambitious projects to make heritage more relevant to young people's lives.

Why did you involve young people in the way you did?

I think because it was such a large-scale investment in work with young people it seems sensible that young people were part of that decision-making process. The organisations have a history of funding work with young people and previous grants streams encourage youth led projects, and this project builds on that. The scale of this grant is much bigger, and the commitment the organisation was making to young people was bigger, and it was important for young people to be involved in that decision-making process. Because of the intentions of Kick The Dust it was really important that young people were involved from the start of the programme which included being part of the decision-making process. The Fund has a history of funding work with young people and previous grants streams encouraged youth led projects, Kick The Dust builds on that. In response to what we were hearing from the heritage and youth sector the scale of this programme is much bigger, allowing for larger scale projects over a longer period of time.

What were the timescales for this project?

12 months



Hackney Quest

Website: <http://www.hackneyquest.org.uk/images/HWTYE.pdf>

What is the name of the project?

Hackney Wick Through Young Eyes

What is the aim of the project?

We wanted to find out more about how local young people felt about their area. Getting them to talk to decision makers about what young people love, the issues they face, and the ideas they have to change Hackney Wick.

Why did you involve young people?

It is the only way of doing it well. I am from Hackney Wick, which is the area we were researching, so it gave me a heightened sense of responsibility to make sure we do it in the right way. It is very important to involve young people in the area. This is because if research had been done in the area back in the day when I was a young person and lived there; I wouldn't have wanted people with no connection to the local community coming in and talking to me as if they get what I am saying.

We also wanted to provide paid opportunities for young people because there is an acute need for paid opportunities for local young people, so I think anything that is being done for or with young people, should involve at least one or two paid opportunities.

The report has had a significant impact on how local decision-makers and businesses think about the young people in the community, and has led to specific improvements to provision for young people in the area, such as the renovation by the council of the Multi-Use Games Area next to the Old Baths building. It also helped catalyse the development of the Hackney-wide Young Futures Commission. None of this would have happened if we hadn't involved young people in leading the project.

What are the time scales of the project?

The project started in December 2016. We undertook the community research between January and July 2017, then did the write-up and design in the latter half of 2017. We formally launched the report to an audience of the general public at the Yard Theatre in Hackney Wick in January 2018 and formally launched it at the Town hall on February 8th, 2018.



Rocket Science

Website: <http://rocketsciencelab.co.uk/>

What is the name of the project?

Richmond youth needs consultation – commissioned by oneRichmond, a partnership between Richmond Parish Lands Charity and Hampton Fund.

What is the aim of the project?

To identify areas of need for young people and gaps in youth services in Richmond. Through this we will develop a greater understanding of where funding should be directed.

Why did you involve young people in the way that you did?

Young people are experts on what is important for young people, so we thought what better way to carry out this project than getting young people engaged in the design and the delivery of the research?

We hoped involving peer researchers as interviewers would allow young interviewees to be more honest in their responses and as such give us access to information that would otherwise have been unavailable. It created a more equal power dynamic between the researcher and the participant.

For the peer researchers themselves, we hoped being involved would give them experience and skills and empower them by ensuring that their voices were at the centre of the research project.

What are the timescales of the project?

The timescale was originally about seven months. The project started in September 2019 and was planned to finish up in March 2020, though due to Covid-19 we have had to temporarily pause the project. The peer research element of the project lasted about 3 months, starting in December and finishing up in February.



**Partnership
for Young
London**