



INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS ABOUT INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

What is Public Involvement?

Public involvement in research is defined as an active process where research is “carried out ‘with’ or ‘by’ members of the public rather than ‘to’, ‘about’ or ‘for’ them” (Hanley et al., 2004: p. 6). Advocates of public involvement believe some of the best research involves those who are affected by its outcomes, as the public can provide 'knowledge in context' which is different but equal to that of scientific experts .

Why should researchers be interested in Public Involvement?

The drive for public involvement in public health research, from bid development to the dissemination of results, has stemmed from health and social care policies in the UK, and a plethora of influential bodies including the Medical Research Council, the Cochrane Collaboration and several research funding bodies and ethics committees. For example, the standard National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) application form requests details of how the public were involved prior to bid submission and how they will be involved during the research process and what budget this will entail. Furthermore the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) encourages involvement to ensure that research is ethical, relevant and acceptable from a public perspective.

Barriers to Public Involvement

Developing public involvement groups to direct research, particularly groups of young people, raises a number of issues. These include researchers believing research is too difficult for young people to understand, that young people will not have the skills or knowledge required to benefit research or being unsure how to make public involvement a meaningful experience for young people. Moreover practical issues include accessing young people, supporting the group both emotionally and financially, making sessions with young people engaging and ensuring the quality of the involvement process for the public and the researcher.

DECIPHer

DECIPHer, the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement, is a UKCRC Public Health Research Centre of Excellence. The Centre is a collaboration between the Universities of Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea, and brings together leading experts from a range of disciplines to research public health issues to improve health.

How can DECIPHer help researchers with Public Involvement?

DECIPHer has established a group of 25 young people aged 14 to 20, that have received training about and have direct experience of advising researchers on public health and social care research. Reflecting the focus of the Centre, the group has adopted the name ALPHA - Advice Leading to Public Health Advancement. Drawn from across the South Wales and Bristol areas and supported by trained youth workers, this group meets monthly and can be accessed by researchers wishing to meaningfully involve young people in directing their research. The DECIPHer Involving Young People Research Officer can also help researchers to develop appropriate sessions to run with ALPHA to ensure quality of the involvement process, and will track the outcomes of the involvement for the young people, researchers and research.



ALPHA Training

The young people receive training relevant to the work they are asked to pursue including sessions outlining public health, the research process, ethics procedures, quantitative and qualitative research designs and methods used such as focus groups, interviews and questionnaires.

ALPHA Experience

ALPHA has developed research ideas, piloted materials, tested questionnaires and interview schedules, and suggested data analysis themes.

The research projects advised on previously include the take up of free school meals, social media and suicide clusters, methods for teaching Personal and Social Education (PSE) and interventions to support self-esteem and prevent obesity.



Feedback

ALPHA have helped organisations such as the Welsh Government, the National Institute of Health Research and The Association of Young People's Health. Some previous feedback has included:

“Working with ALPHA was refreshing, inspiring and enjoyable. The quality of discussion was excellent, the questions pertinent and the critique of the report format/content incredibly valuable.”

“Very little effort was required from myself to acquire some valuable information. Little pain – plenty of gain.”

“Hayley was very helpful, outlining how the ALPHA group could support the programme and when they would be meeting. She also provided the completed referee assessment forms ahead of the deadline set.”



Benefits for Young People

Young people receive a gift voucher for attending the monthly sessions, which are held in Cardiff University. All travel costs are reimbursed and the sessions include lunch. Young people receive accreditation through the Millennium Volunteering Award and have opportunities to have fun and socialise together.

Costs

All group activities are risk assessed and covered by Cardiff University's public liability insurance. As the ALPHA sessions come with a range of costs, DECIPHer adopted/affiliated projects are expected to cost in ALPHA when developing bids. External projects will be expected to make a contribution to costs.

For further details please contact:

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DECIPHer website: <http://www.decipher.uk.net/>

ALPHA website: bit.ly/UldfD9 Twitter: @ALPHA_DECIPHer



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