

Collaborative research with older gay men and lesbians

This paper examines a recently funded project into the needs of older gay men and lesbians in the Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset area, funded via a Community Fund grant. This is a joint project between Bournemouth University and Help and Care, a local voluntary sector agency working with older people and their carers.

The paper will provide an overview of the existing literature in this area and will add to this by providing practical examples experienced in the first year of this project. The paper will examine issues relating to the recruitment of volunteers, the identification and prioritising of themes and the tensions relating to this type of research. This project is using a collaborative model through a Participatory Action Research methodology. The importance of approaching research with minority groups of older people in an inclusive way, and the implications of participatory research will be also be explored.

Best practice in involving service users and carers in research: Confronting the issues and doing it for real

We aim to tease out the discrepancies between theory and practice when involving service users and carers in research

and to make participants discuss the issues behind the reality of “meaningful involvement”. In order to achieve this, we will use our own involvement in collaboration with the local university. We are very aware that we are probably experiencing best practice but also that issues are not quite so clear-cut and that there are potential limitations and barriers to involving users and carers fully. Through a group exercise using an imaginary research project concentrating around designing and undertaking research, we hope to make participants think about the range of practical issues at stake (funding, training, professional support, honorary contracts, CRB checks etc.), about the meaning of involvement for both service users and professionals (making positive use of service users’ research skills, cultural differences, addressing the fears of professionals, etc.) and the question of recruitment (who?, how?). We aim to tackle these issues productively and to generate a positive exchange of views hoping that participants, thinking about their own projects, current or future, will take ideas and solutions back to their groups and teams.... and do it for real!