

## **Example 4: Queer Futures**

### **Using Facebook to involve young people in the design and delivery of research about suicide and self-harm**

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#### **About the research**

[Queer Futures](#) is a two-year study that aims to understand the experiences and perspectives of young (16-25 years old) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) people in order to help reduce their risk of self-harm and suicide. It is particularly interested in how gender and sexuality may influence young people's distress.

Phase 1 of the research asks 30 young LGBTQ people to talk with a researcher either online or face-to-face. In phase 2, an online questionnaire will be sent to as many young LGBTQ people around the country as possible. There will also be an online questionnaire for mental health staff.

The study is being funded by the Department of Health Policy Research Programme and aims to produce knowledge that can contribute to the government's suicide prevention strategy.

#### **How have people been involved?**

LGBTQ young people have been involved from an early stage. The research team was very keen to involve them because of the subject matter - LGBTQ suicide and self-harm is a very difficult area to research. The researchers wanted to ensure that they were asking the right questions and they needed help to recruit participants, so they set up a LGBTQ advisory group.

Initially a senior member of the research team visited two LGBTQ youth groups in different parts of the country. She talked with the youth worker and then with some young people who were interested in the project. This led to the establishment of the advisory group.

The group will meet face-to-face on three occasions, but it is predominately operating using a [secret Facebook group](#). This communication method was chosen by the young people, who also set up the Facebook group.

#### **What were the challenges?**

Young people who are active on social media are more comfortable online; it is not all young people's preferred form of communication.

You have to keep it going so that the young people don't lose interest.

## **What resources were involved?**

Use of social media in this project saved time – it would not have been possible to have the level of involvement that there has been if all interactions with the advisory group had been face-to-face.

## **The impact of using social media**

The advisory group has had a huge influence on the research, orienting the team to what's most important for LGBTQ young people. Members commented on the participant information sheet and helped to develop the Queer Futures [website](#). They helped the researchers to devise the interview schedule, and suggested developing a summary of what will be asked in the interviews.

Advisory group members used their online networks to help the researchers to recruit participants. The researchers knew there were lots of LGBTQ young people who might be prepared to take part, but were struggling to find them. The young people sent out the researchers' request to take part to their networks of LGBTQ young people, for example through [Tumblr](#). This made a big difference to the research.

## **Advice to other researchers about using social media to actively involve people in research**

“Social media isn't a quick fix. It's resource intensive. It can be as brilliant as it can be a complete failure. You need to understand why you're using it. Do your research about whether the people you want to involve are using social media. If we had just set up a Facebook page it wouldn't have worked – we needed to have the discussions with the young people.”

Liz McDermott, Queer Futures, Lancaster University

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**Reference:** INVOLVE (2014) Examples of the use of social media for active public involvement - Queer Futures: Using Facebook to involve young people in the design and delivery of research about suicide and self-harm