

Involving young people in research

EACH-B is a five-year research programme aimed at encouraging young people to eat healthily and get active.

A key part of this is involving young people throughout the research.

Sam Goad from INVOLVE met **Dr Sofia Strommer**, who is leading the programme, and **Helena Woodvine**, one of the young people involved.



Dr Sofia Strommer and Helena Woodvine

Tell us about the research?

(Sofia) EACH-B is an intervention that we are developing which aims to help and support young people to be healthier, to be more active and to make better choices with their food. We have been working together with a lot of young people to find out what their lives are like, what kinds of food they like to eat, what they don't like to eat, what's relevant for them and important for them so that we are not reinventing the wheel and also so we are doing something that is going to work.

How have you been involving young people in the research?

(Sofia) We have been working together with young people designing all our paperwork, our information sheets, logo and consent forms. Then we have done some more formal work. We have been interviewing students at school and, through charities, to more marginalised young people as well to explore their lives, their barriers and facilitators to being healthier.

Helena, how did you get involved?

(Helena) My mum found out and asked me whether I would be able to help with some research to see how much activity teenagers do.

What did you think about getting involved?

(Helena) I thought it was fine. It is good to help research because it will help other people understand teenagers and how we relate to others.

What do you think you could bring to the study?

(Helena) Useful information about how we think and what we like from our point of view.

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What kind of things has Helena been involved in?

(Sofia) When we come to the actual intervention we will be asking the participants to wear an activity tracker for a whole week at baseline before they start the intervention and then at the end of it. We wanted to test it out to see if young people would absolutely not want to use it or if it was ugly or if there was anything that would interfere with that and if it was acceptable to them.

Do you remember about what they asked you?

(Helena) There were questions about how we would improve it, was it good, was it ok wearing it, would you recommend it to your friends, that kind of thing. I thought it was fine. It looked just like a normal watch. The colour was good because it was quite simple and it looked quite normal, quite casual – that was good, but maybe it might be a bit uncomfortable when sleeping.

(Sofia) So it is this kind of information that is hugely helpful to us, because that could be the difference between somebody wearing the tracker or not, between somebody taking part or not.

What have you enjoyed so far about being part of the study?

(Helena) I liked helping with the research, doing something to help so it is easier for other people to understand.

Have you learnt anything in particular?

(Helena) I have learnt a few things about food and how much you should eat and exercise.

What have you learnt from the involvement of young people?

(Sofia) So much. I have learnt that money is a huge factor. So if you get pocket money and things like that you really want to make sure you are getting value for that money when you are buying things from school or on the way to school – that is something that is really important.

And young people that we have spoken to have really strongly said that all they want is to be heard, to be respected and to find people to connect with. They want to have these meaningful relationships with teachers and other people in their lives but the dynamics aren't always necessarily helpful.

More specific things, they have told us canteen food isn't great. The school we went to, where we spoke to the students, they said their canteen food was terrible. They wanted to get value for money when they were buying lunch from school and so that often went on paninis and pizzas rather than healthier options.

What difference do you think Helena's involvement has made to the study?

(Sofia) It has been absolutely invaluable. It has been so helpful to get feedback on the things that we want to do and specifically these trackers for example. I was looking at it thinking this might be really ugly, they might not want to wear it because it is just black – this is my idea of how it might work but we can't work on the basis of those ideas alone so it has been incredibly helpful to get the views of the actual people we want to work with and to find out about what they actually think about it. And also to find out where the problems are.

What has been the experience for you overall?

(Helena) It's been very fun, it has been interesting and it's also helpful because you do it in groups. You meet new people. You can listen to other people's ideas and then they'll listen to you and you can talk about it. It's useful for me as well because I get to help people and it is good life skills talking to people.

To find out more about EACH-B visit www.southampton.ac.uk/lifelab/research/each-b.page

INVOLVE is part of the National Institute for Health Research and supports active public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research.

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