

Shared research



Who better to interview people about a social care scheme than those who have been supported by it?

Shared Lives Peer Researchers **Rachel Turner** and **Paul Vickery** and Principal Investigator **Nadia Brookes** explain.

Shared Lives

In Shared Lives, a young person or adult who needs support or a place to live moves in with or regularly visits an approved Shared Lives carer, after they have got to know each other, and the local Shared Lives scheme has matched them for compatibility. Together, they share family and community life. This local social care scheme is used by a variety of people including those with learning disabilities, mental health problems, older people and care leavers. This research looked at the effectiveness of Shared Lives as a model of community support.

What was the public involvement element of this research?

Nadia: When we planned the project we decided that we wanted to include peer researchers to actually help us gather information from people being supported by Shared Lives. We produced a role description in Easy Read format explaining what it was we actually wanted people to do. We said what the main tasks would be and what kind of things we thought people might need to be able to do the role, like being friendly, being able to talk to lots of different people, happy to work in a team, good at listening, those kind of things. And that it was a paid role. We had three peer researchers who agreed to take part.

Paul: We met about every other month to put a plan together to work out how we were going to do it and how were we going to talk to people.

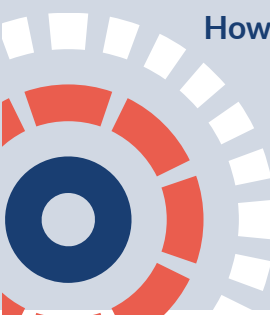
What did you think about becoming a peer researcher?

Rachel: It was really good to be honest because the main thing for me is to help other people and make sure that people get to have a better life than what I've had. So it's all about helping and supporting people really.

How did the peer researchers contribute?

Nadia: We had some ideas about what we might want to put in the interview topic guide and they came up with other ideas about what questions to ask. Obviously, one of the reasons for getting peer researchers involved was that they have more insight into what is important.

Continued over...



Nadia: We didn't realise that questions around friends were important. Whether, for example, somebody could stay over. A lot of people on the Shared Lives scheme were living with other families so it was important whether they could do those sort of things. We hadn't really thought about this, because we thought more in terms of needs being met in other ways.

What did you feel you were able to bring to the research?

Rachel: All my experience, knowledge and ideas really. That really helped.

Paul: It helped that I was involved because I know how it feels to live with a carer.

Did that experience help you in being a peer researcher?

Rachel: Absolutely, yes. It's experience of living with a Shared Lives carer. It helped the interviewees as well because they have got someone who has gone through it themselves and that's why they found it easier to answer questions.

What do you think having peer researchers brought to the research?

Nadia: They put people a lot more at ease than I think somebody from the university coming to speak to people would have. Because the people they were interviewing were across a spectrum of learning disabilities I think they got better information than we would have.

They were able to build up more of a rapport and came at things from a slightly different angle. Our focus would have been just to get that information we needed for our research project.

What did you enjoy most about being a peer researcher?

Paul: My favourite bit about being a peer researcher was hearing different people answering different questions and listening to other people's views about Shared Lives.

What did you think of the research?

Paul: I think the research did a lot of good as we learned what people liked and didn't like.

Do you hope to do more research in the future?

Rachel: I think it is important that there are loads of things that people don't know, like the people from the outside, who don't know how much things are affecting people. I am hoping there is something we can do to change things, to try and help other people.



Left: Peer Researchers Rachel Turner and Paul Vickery

The Shared Lives Evidence of Effectiveness research was funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research. For more information, please contact N.K.Brookes@kent.ac.uk

For information on Shared Lives visit: <https://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/>