

HOW TO SET UP A PEER RESEARCH GROUP

A step-by-step manual, co-created by Peer Researchers with lived experience of Temporary Accommodation



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Justlife



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Funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and delivered by The Young Foundation, the Community Knowledge Fund supports grassroots community groups and organisations across the UK to find new solutions to local and national challenges by uncovering knowledge and turning great ideas into action.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2023, Justlife convened a group of five peer researchers in Brighton, funded by the Young Foundation, to establish a group that will be able to carry out peer research and explore the use of peer research as a method for accessing first-hand community knowledge of intersectionality in Temporary Accommodation. The results of this pilot have been compiled in this manual.

The manual has been co-created by the peer researchers, to guide other peer research projects through the process of setting up, by sharing some of the successes and challenges we have faced. It is not a manual for carrying out research, this is the next stage, rather it aims to establish a base that makes future research projects safe and productive. All peer researchers in this pilot have first-hand experience of homelessness and Temporary Accommodation (TA); the topic of our research. Although it has been designed with TA in mind, we believe the learning is relevant in other settings too.

To make it easier for you to pick and choose what is relevant to you, the manual is divided into three main parts: The Manual - a step-by-step guide, with detailed suggestions as to what you might want to consider if you are setting up your own peer research project; Our Story - what we did, with insights from our experience for you to take inspiration from; and Our Story - what we've learnt, where we share our reflections on the process. Each part is laid out so that you can choose to read it end to end, or dip into the headings you are interested in. We have added various documents, resources and session plans that have been helpful to us in the appendices, and throughout part three you will see quotes from the peers.

Why peer research?

Peer research is a way of carrying out research collaboratively with people who have lived experience of the topic being researched. Peer researchers are typically not professional researchers but people with firsthand knowledge related to the subject matter. They may belong to the same community or have faced similar challenges, now or in the past, which makes them uniquely qualified to contribute valuable insights and perspectives to the research process.

The use of peers in research helps ensure that the study is informed by the perspectives of those directly affected, promoting inclusivity and potentially collecting data that would otherwise not have been accessible. It also empowers what tend to be marginalised voices.

Who this manual is for

This manual is for organisations and research institutions interested in setting up their own peer research projects, and for the involved peers. The aim is to guide the transition from peer to peer researcher. It is not a guide for carrying out peer research, but rather preparing peers so that they can meaningfully and safely do so in future.

PART 1: The Manual – a step-by-step guide

This chapter guides you through setting up your own peer research group. A peer research programme can yield unique insights that may not have come about without lived experience; different questions may be asked, and different answers may also be achieved when the research is conducted by peer researchers. In addition, peer research can become an empowering experience for those participating, facilitating organisations and communities, with opportunities for personal growth and community impact.

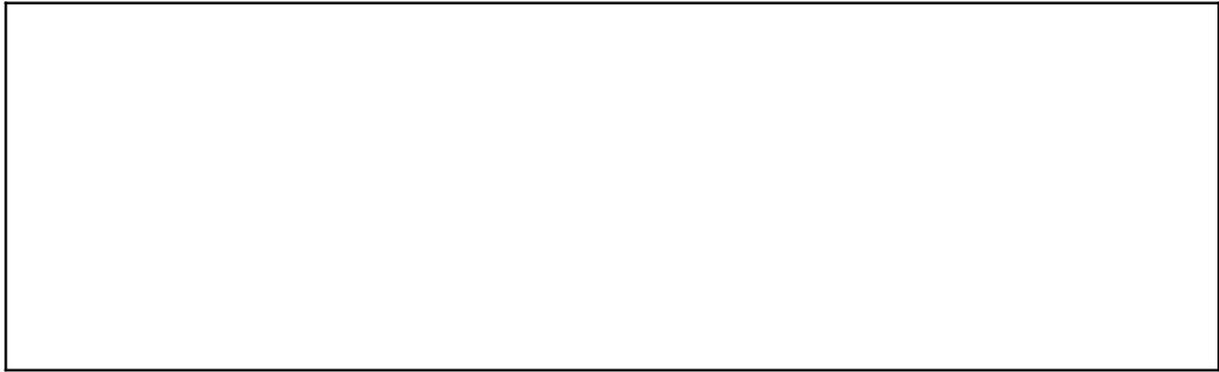
The following questions are designed to get you thinking about your purpose and aims, and why you want to carry out peer research.

Question 1: Why do you want to carry out peer research? What will peer research bring to what you are trying to achieve that non-peer research will not?

Think about your motivations. Is it to gain new insights, collaborate on a shared problem, empower your participants or work more collaboratively? Will there be unique insights that couldn't be heard otherwise, and what purpose does gaining these serve?

Depending on your topic, peer researchers may have experience of trauma directly relating to your topic of research, and as a result, may experience the resurfacing of difficult memories and feelings when talking to others still experiencing these circumstances. This is commonly described as 'triggering'.

Question 2: Do you have the resources to carry out peer research? *This includes money and time, but also the ability to ensure it is a safe experience for the peers (see Support, Safety and Ethics on page 5 for some guidance).*



You may at this point decide that peer research is not for you, either because you are unable to provide the resources necessary to make this a safe experience, or perhaps you've found that regular research better suits your aims. If you do want to establish a peer research project, read on.

The basics: You will need...

This is a checklist of things to consider before setting up a peer research project, based on our experiences. Much of it will be familiar to you if you have run workshops or group work before, but some things are specific to running a peer research project. You may want to add to the list depending on your particular situation; this is just a starting point.

Before you start, check that you have:

- Focus:** A general idea of the area of research and who you want to work with.
- People:** At least two facilitators to run the peer research group sessions. One person should always be on hand to step out and provide support if a participant needs private support. Depending on the topic, the sessions may be difficult for some (e.g. triggering traumatic responses).
- Time:** Time to give to the group learning and process, and to provide support to the people involved in your project. Some conversations can't be rushed; everyone must be on board with every step of the process.
- Budget:** In addition to staff and venue costs, peer participants should be reimbursed for their time, as well as having a budget for basic stationery resources and snacks.)
- Policies:** You will need the relevant safeguarding policies and guidelines on research ethics. Also, see Appendix A for our project guidance on this, and Appendix B for our lived experience reward policy.

Here is a checklist of things to consider for each session:

- A schedule of sorts** (it can be fairly loose), including a break and clarity on who is facilitating which parts.
- We recommend having a breakout space;** a room where people can retreat to if they need to take time out. Peer research can at times be upsetting. Do you know where that is?
- Knowing the venue,** including accessible toilets, fire procedures and escapes, and key contacts.

- Details in line with your attendance policy;** Can people opt in/out without telling you, or do you need to know numbers in advance?

Running the sessions:

- Session plan emailed to everyone with details of the venue
- Arrive in time to set up the room
- Biscuits, snacks, tea, coffee etc
- Pens, pencils, flipchart, paper, post-it notes
- IT equipment
- Invoice sheet or petty cash if needed to reimburse participants
- Copy of the group agreement to stick up (see Ground Rules and Group Agreements on page 16)
- A phone or some other way people can get hold of you if need be

After each session:

- Send a brief recap email to everyone
- Any follow-up needed with participants or other facilitators in line with your group agreement, safeguarding policies or based on any conversations you have had with individuals

In addition to these basics, there are several areas that you should consider. We have grouped some of them here.

Accessibility

When we talk about making spaces accessible, we're talking about logistics as well as creating places where everyone can feel comfortable and included. This means creating environments that promote equity and inclusivity through:

- **Logistical Accessibility.** Consider transport and other logistical barriers people may have to attend. For example, when working with families, addressing childcare needs can be the difference between attendance and non-attendance.
- **Physical Accessibility.** This is about making sure that everyone, no matter their physical abilities, can get around easily. Think wider doors, ramps, door openers, and accessible toilets. It is also important to consider how people will get to your venue. Depending on your participants, being close to a bus stop and having access to disabled parking may be preferable.
- **Sensory Accessibility.** Some people might have different ways of experiencing the world, including physical disabilities like being deaf or blind, or neurodivergence such as Autism or ADHD, which can include heightened sensory experiences. Sensory accessibility means considering things like sign language interpreters or Braille signs. It also could include accommodations for autistic people such as softer lighting, and a room that is away from sudden unexpected noises.
- **Psychological Accessibility.** This is about creating a welcoming and safe environment for everyone and taking care of mental health as well as physical health. It involves supporting people emotionally, reducing stigma, and being mindful of topics that might be triggering to some.

Bear this in mind as you go through the following questions, which are designed to help you identify who will be involved in your peer research project, and what they will do, and then to guide you through the process of making sure the project is accessible for them.

Question 3: Who do you want to be involved? Which demographic are you aiming to work with? *And why?* Which organisations or community groups might be involved? If you can get specific (ie. if you already know individuals who will be involved!) include that.

Question 4: Who will do what on the project? *Include everyone, from organisational admin to the peer researchers themselves. Will peer researchers be involved in co-design from the start, or purely as participants? Will people be involved in just one aspect like gathering data, or analysis and dissemination, too?*

Question 5: What kind of accessibility needs might there be in the group (participants and facilitators)? *Consider the list above, and write anything you know for sure (i.e. if you already have members recruited). If the peers have not been recruited yet, consider how you can include these questions as part of your recruitment.*

Once the group is meeting, it is a good idea to ask whether they have accessibility needs that are not covered. People may or may not feel comfortable sharing, but they should have the opportunity.

Support, Safety and Ethics

Now that you've had some time to think about who will be involved, and what accessibility looks like for the people you will be working with, it's time to think more deeply about what you can offer as the supporting organisation. Doing a support "inventory check" ensures that your project aligns with your available resources, preventing overcommitment and enabling you to set realistic expectations for the journey ahead.

Question 6: What resources do you have available for this project? *Include time, people, budget, connections, referral routes etc. You might want to review your answers to question two again.*

Question 7: Who will facilitate the sessions and what skills and time do they bring to this work? *For instance, have your facilitators run a group like this before, or will this be their first time?*

The need to balance safety and ethics, while also acknowledging the potential for difficult conversations in peer research, is a delicate balancing act. Safety and ethical considerations prioritise the well-being of participants and researchers, but doing peer research is inherently potentially triggering. Checking in regularly with participants is particularly important when working with peers.

This includes taking time to ensure that participants are comfortable with the pace of progress and fostering openness to create a psychologically safe environment. Safeguarding measures are in place to protect participants from harm, and ethics play a central role in ensuring safe working practices.

Question 8: What might be difficult topics for your participants in this project?

Question 9: With this in mind, what kind of support will you realistically be able to offer your participants? *E.g., one-to-ones, signposting, or just in-session pastoral care?*

Knowledge exchange – non-extractive research

Peer research is a two-way process where participants and facilitators learn from each other. This exchange is a cornerstone of non-extractive research. In addition, participants will gain other skills, such as learning about research methods and ethics in research, which you may want to advertise before starting.

Question 10: What's in it for your participants? What will they gain from their involvement?

Question 11: Think about what your output aims are. How will you credit your participants or involve them at this stage?

Question 12: How will you pay or reimburse your participants?

Review...

You may now want to take the time to go back and review what you've written. Is there anything you couldn't answer, or didn't feel clear about? If so, that's ok, you may find the answers in the next section where we'll share our learning about the importance of facilitation, time, reflection and ethics, and some tips on how to approach it.

Group learning – facilitation, time and reflection

Group learning is the process by which participants collectively acquire new knowledge, skills, and insights. The group process is about the interpersonal dynamics, interactions, and relationship-building within the group. Striking a balance between these two aspects is vital, especially when working in an inclusive, psychologically informed way.

Learning research skills is essential for peers to be equipped to carry out research and become *peer researchers*. The more they learn, the more autonomous the group will become. Equally, a healthy group dynamic is critical to creating an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and psychological safety, ensuring that participants not only gain knowledge but also feel comfortable using it and motivated to contribute.

In Part 2 of this manual, you can read about what we covered in our sessions (as well as find the resources used in the appendices).

Ground Rules and Group Agreements

Developing a group agreement together in the very first session, covering how to behave and communicate in the sessions, goes some way to creating a safe space. This can be kept on a wall for reference and may evolve. A group agreement creates a shared framework for respectful and constructive interactions. You can see a copy of our first group agreement in Appendix C.

In addition, allowing everyone to check in and check out at each session allows participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and reflect on what they've learned or contributed during the session. Facilitators should also participate in this to encourage a sense of mutuality.

Upholding these rules is a shared responsibility, but facilitators often play a key role in reminding the group of the rules, addressing any breaking of the agreement, and ensuring that they are followed to support a positive and inclusive group dynamic. Facilitators should also monitor whether the ground rules are still working for the group or need re-addressing.

Question 13: What facilitation skills or techniques have you used before? What might work in the context and why?

One-to-ones, Paid Homework and Self-Guided Tasks

Offering one-to-ones for participants to share their thoughts and concerns provides a more personalised and private opportunity for reflection and feedback. Participants can raise any concerns they wouldn't want to raise in front of the group, helping the facilitators to support the wellbeing of everyone and pick up on potential issues early. Asking participants to choose where they would like their one-to-ones to take place is a great way to tailor the support to their needs and build trust and accessibility.

Allocating time for optional homework or self-guided tasks outside of your meeting time can deepen participants' understanding. Solitude helps some individuals to reflect better on their experiences, research findings, and the impact of their contributions, as well as giving people space to process discussions that have taken place in sessions. For some people, it increases accessibility.

Encouraging people to take ownership and value their reflections can lead to some profound personal insights¹, as well as the cultivation of reflective practice that extends beyond the research project context. Additionally, by paying people for this time out of the room, you are acknowledging the value of participants' time.

¹ Mortari, L. (2015). Reflectivity in Research Practice: An Overview of Different Perspectives . *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. [online] <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618045>.

Facilitator support

It is also important to provide the facilitators support. Facilitating peer research can be emotionally, psychologically and intellectually demanding, with possible complex dynamics and challenges within the group. Reflecting on what happened in the sessions enhances the facilitators' well-being and enables them to refine their facilitation skills, leading to a healthier learning environment.

Question 14: How will you build space and time for reflection into your project?
Think about bringing it into the sessions, time outside of the sessions and the reflective practice and support your facilitators will engage in.

Being wise with time

When people come together as a group of peers to discuss potentially challenging topics, they not only bring experience but also emotions. A gradual process allows people to get to know each other and build trust. It encourages a sense of openness and psychological safety, making it easier for participants to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement or reprisal.

Research has shown that working slowly is often the most psychologically accessible and trauma-informed way of running a participatory group², as it gives people time to build trust, process information, time to raise issues or worries privately if need be, and the opportunity to get some space from the work and return to it, reducing the risk of burnout or psychological overload.

Question 15: Reflect again on what time you have to give this project. Are you planning to take days, weeks or months with your training? Considering this, and the needs of your group, how will you make the most of the time you've got to build in time for reflection and space, as well as bonding and connection?

² McGeown, H. Et al. (2023). *Trauma-informed co-production: Collaborating and combining expertise to improve access to primary care with women with complex needs*. [online] Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37430474/> [Accessed 23 Nov. 2023].

Part 2: Our Story – What We Did

There were five peer researchers and two Justlife facilitators. All participants, and one facilitator, have first-hand experience of homelessness in Brighton and have experienced needs not being met due to diverse identities. These include neurodiversity, disability, gender, sexuality, class, age, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

People experiencing homelessness who are living in TA are often treated as a homogenous group. Services tend to apply a one-size-fits-all approach, which poorly reflects the variety of people and experiences in this kind of accommodation. We know minoritized groups, including people who identify as LGBTQ+³, people with disabilities⁴ and people who are black and from minoritised backgrounds⁵, experience homelessness to a greater extent than they are represented in the wider population. However, these intersectional experiences are rarely represented in service design.

This can lead to services which are neither safe nor effective, or even actively harmful. In Brighton, we felt there was a clear opportunity to empower a more diverse group of residents in TA, while accessing the knowledge held by first-hand experience to gain better insight into the housing and homelessness system, and how to improve it.

Initial set-up and one-to-one meetings

Preliminary one-to-one meetings gave peers a chance to meet one of the team and feel a sense of connection to someone before entering the main group. For the peers, these pre-meetings played a key role in establishing a foundation of safety and comfort. For the facilitators, it gave a chance to chat to the people who would be part of the project, and assess if it felt like a good fit.

³ Bhandal, J. and Horwood, M. (2021). *The LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Report*. [online] AKT. Available at: <https://www.akt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/akt-thelgbtqyouthhomelessnessreport2021.pdf> [Accessed 20 Nov. 2023].

⁴ Stone, B. and Wertans, E. (2023). *Homelessness and Disability in the UK*. [online] Centre for Homelessness Impact. Available at: https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/645a76da097c6dad33fcc423_CHI-disabilities-homelessness23.pdf [Accessed 23 Nov. 2023].

⁵ Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2022). *Homelessness amongst Black and minoritised ethnic communities in the UK: a statistical report on the state of the nation*. [online] Herriot-Watt University. Available at: <https://researchportal.hw.ac.uk/en/publications/homelessness-amongst-black-and-minoritised-ethnic-communities-in->

Each preliminary was shaped by the conversation and needs of the peer but was guided by these rough aims:

- To strike up rapport and connection
- To find out what each person's goals and aspirations from being involved were
- To explain a bit more about the project and answer any questions
- To find out what accessibility needs there might be, and what would make the group feel more comfortable

Following these initial one-to-ones, and before the first session together, a project information pack (see Appendix A) and a rough plan for session timings for the first two months were sent out. The activities in this project were designed to be accessible and trauma-informed. This included collectively agreeing on how to work together, check-ins/check-outs at each session, and a break halfway through. There were always two regular facilitators at the sessions in case the subject material was triggering and individuals needed time away from the group. On a few occasions, when one of the regular facilitators was unable to make it, this meant bringing someone else in.

We also offered one-to-one sessions where peer participants were able to bring up things they did not feel comfortable discussing in the group. The facilitator who had the initial meetings with the peers led participant support and was the main point of contact for the group throughout the pilot. The other facilitator brought experience and skills in research.

The sessions

The pilot consisted of 12 two-hour in-person workshops over three months. We aimed to always meet at the same venue, but this was not always possible. Finding alternative venues, often at short notice, sometimes meant accessibility was compromised.

The sessions covered a mix of more formal training in topics such as research methods and ethics, and group discussions guided by peers (you can find the resources used in the sessions in the appendices). We felt this combination, with sufficient time for the peers to absorb and reflect in between, was a good way to ensure that peers gained the skills necessary to carry out research, while also remaining at the centre of the process.

The topics covered in the sessions included:

- Establishing ground rules/group working agreement (see Appendix C)
- Research methods (see Appendix E)
- Intersectionality
- Ethics in Research (see Appendix E)
- Identifying personal skills and interests
- Designing and testing research methodologies
- Insider/Outsider positions in research
- How to develop a good research question

In addition, there were four three-hour homework sessions, which included desk research using books that were shared, the internet (including Google Scholar), reflection time guided by handouts, practising chosen research methods in safe environments, and developing their research questions.

In Appendix D you will find a week-by-week session timetable so you can see how we structured our sessions and what the aim was for each. In Appendix E, you will find slides from the research methods, intersectionality and ethics in research sessions, handouts for self-led reflective tasks, and our personal skills workshop outline.

Facilitation techniques used

Space Holding

Space holding is the practice of creating and maintaining a respectful, inclusive and accessible environment within a group. It involves the facilitators actively cultivating an atmosphere where participants can openly share, express themselves, and engage in meaningful discussions without fear of judgement or disrespect. Effective space holding is essential in peer research to promote psychological safety and trust, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected throughout the process. Space holding formed the cornerstone of all our facilitation, and the key to effectively employing all the other methods.

Check-In and Check-Out

Check-in and check-out are essential to help people feel like they have “landed”, for people to voice worries or concerns, or just “temperature checks” (ie, I’m feeling happy/hyper/tired).

During check-in, participants share their thoughts, feelings, or concerns at the beginning of a session, setting the tone for open communication. Check-out allows participants to reflect on the meeting's content and express any final thoughts or takeaways. These practices promote emotional well-being, create a space for participants to voice their needs, and foster a sense of closure and continuity within the group.

For groups that have a wide spectrum of neurodiversity, this is particularly important and useful to get a sense of what the energy and sensory needs in the room are.

Group Discussion

Group discussion is a collaborative conversation among participants in which they exchange ideas, experiences, and perspectives on a particular topic or research question. It enables participants to collectively explore and analyse issues, and insights, and collaboratively form their conclusions. It’s also a great way for group members to hear and consider opinions that might differ from their own. Group

discussions work best with facilitator-led timekeeping or prompts, or the facilitators can guide the participants in setting prompts for themselves.

Working in Pairs

Pair work can be great for focused discussions or collaborative tasks. This approach encourages deeper exploration of topics, provides an opportunity for participants to share with a smaller audience, and creates the chance for more meaningful interactions. Pair work can enhance participation, break down barriers, and facilitate more in-depth conversations within the larger group setting.

Facilitators can support pair work by checking in during the process, asking how the pair are getting on, and reflecting on what they hear, as well as keeping time.

PART 3: Our Story – what we've learnt

During the six months together, our group's confidence and expertise grew immensely. In addition to gaining new knowledge and skills, the peers experienced increased trust and improved ability to interact and participate in a group setting. The group was described as a place of "camaraderie", "thought-provoking learning", "humour and jokes" and "deep respect for one another".

The peer researchers also had the opportunity to use their learning in external contexts, building their confidence around the value added by their knowledge and experience. As a result, three peer researchers worked with us to update their CVs, one of the peers got a part-time job working for a homelessness charity, and another is currently attending job interviews where he will be using skills learnt as part of this group.

Justlife's learning from leading this project has impacted the planning processes of the facilitators and managers, specifically around how to provide better, ethical opportunities for including lived experience in our daily work. We have learnt how to create safe spaces for those with lived experience to be engaged in an empowering way across our work and learnt specific ways we can be more accessible through planning with enough time, one-to-one support, intentional facilitation, accessibility and remuneration.

Why we think this pilot was a success

We're proud of what our group has achieved and there are some key ingredients we feel have contributed to this success. We've clustered what worked into 8 themes:

- 1) Accessibility**
- 2) Knowledge Exchange**
- 3) Support**
- 4) Being wise with time**
- 5) Two Person Facilitation**
- 6) Group Process**
- 7) Payment**
- 8) Joy and Fun**

There are some natural overlaps between these, but we felt each of these “topline” headings was integral to our success, and therefore needs to be acknowledged and explained in detail.

Accessibility

Peer Perspective: Safety nets included trigger warnings and making sure we progressed at a pace that was suitable for all. We used metaphors in the early stages until everyone was ready to discuss topics that were potentially challenging for people with lived experience (see Appendix E.i.). For example, we talked about orange and green people to avoid participants feeling too close to the topic. As trust was built, the metaphors began to feel more like a barrier than an aid, and we moved on to discuss things that were based on reality. Self-reflection for participants and facilitators was very important, as it allowed people to explore their boundaries and needs. We focused on our group’s skills and perceptions of reality and the social change that can be served through research, rather than people’s individual stories and trauma.

We initially struggled with physical accessibility, as we found that our first venue was not accessible. But as we were a small group we were able to adapt and learn for moving forward.

“Accessibility is very important – physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, psychological safety.”

“Equity and equality were built-in throughout and spoken about explicitly.”

“There was interpersonal flexibility – ie. space for people to express themselves in whatever way felt most natural to them. The group were great at making space for each other in this way.”

Justlife perspective

We would build in extra time and different options to allow our group to tell us when they felt ready to progress or not. In the early stages, it felt helpful to talk about different demographics or identities by using colours that do not reflect

reality, for example, a group of orange, striped or purple people, and how they experience different settings. After trust had been built, we decided it was no longer helpful and moved on to talk about people who identify as LGBTQ+, are neurodivergent, come from a different ethnic background, etc.

We also tried to pick venues that weren't typically used by homeless services, knowing that some participants might have had bad experiences in those settings, and wanting to create a space that wasn't an extension of the typical services.

Knowledge Exchange

Peer's perspective: There was a conversational approach to learning and time for concepts to be chewed over and debated. Everyone's perspectives were valued and we learned from one another as well as from the training content. The facilitators brought in books for borrowing about research and storytelling. We had time to reflect and record what we were learning from the sessions and the group process, and towards the end of the pilot, participants were reflecting and doing self-directed learning on upcoming themes, and contributing ideas for how to run certain sessions.

“There is a wide group variety. People from a huge mix of backgrounds, broad neurodiversity in the room, huge amounts of life experience and perspectives, which led to really interesting shared learning from each other.”

“Listening to the views of the group specifically on the topic of TA has been enriching and informative.”

“I think this is a highly ambitious and relatively groundbreaking project which has been a really refreshing and quite challenging way of looking at how knowledge is used and how new knowledge is found/ constructed.”

Justlife perspective

We started this project with a research skills training plan and set aims, but were open throughout to adjusting according to the feedback from peer participants. We asked them to design how they wanted to share any knowledge generated.

This manual, and the research questions that our group developed, are the product of that process.

Support

Peers Perspective: Attending the sessions was optional. The content for each session was emailed to participants before the session so everyone came prepared and had a chance to opt-out should we wish. This rarely happened. Support was offered throughout as well as additional one-to-one sessions if participants felt the need to discuss something privately. Being fed and watered, as well as paid, meant we could look after ourselves in the sessions.

We were given time and skills to define our boundaries in research through the language of ethics and safety, rather than imposed content restrictions or top-down support plans.

“There were safety nets built in - trigger warnings throughout, which doesn't always happen in these spaces. However, there was also freedom to explore difficult topics.”

“In the beginning, we used metaphors to represent people and situations (ie “How do we make TA more well equipped for stripey people and blue people”) this allowed us to avoid bias and to focus on the methods of research rather than the content. It also created safety and allowed us to gradually ease into talking about homelessness when the group were comfortable with each other and the concepts of research.”

Justlife perspective

It was essential that the peers were adequately supported to participate in this process, and that the process wasn't rushed. The feedback from the peers suggests we got it right.

Being wise with time

Peer perspective

We spent months working together, in two-hour chunks including weeks where we didn't meet but instead did (paid) lightly guided self-reflection. There was camaraderie and focus as a result of this slow build. It was really important to include a ten-minute tea break in the sessions and to include check-in and check-out in the overall timing, as that's where we could raise issues or concerns.

"The 2 hours per session worked well. Even though it was challenging at times, it was a great consistent boundary for us to work to, and be focused in."

"We had a focus: working towards the timeline which was set by our funding. Openness about this from a start helped".

"We had a natural rate of working, no pressure to conform to any expectations."

Justlife perspective

We did training in a series of weekly meetings over three months, rather than in full-day sessions over a shorter period. Our group was learning about, and designing, research into potentially challenging topics that they may have experienced themselves. Taking time to build up and bond as a group created a safe space in which we could trust each other, ask for support and give care where needed, and understand how we all listen and contribute in different ways.

Two-Person Facilitation

Peer perspective

Having two facilitators meant that if someone was triggered or needed to leave, one person could check on them and offer support while the other stayed with the group. It felt like all of us, peers and facilitators were members of the group, and there was good communication between sessions.

“There was a non-patronising approach to facilitation – we felt like equals.”

“Facilitators initially upheld the group agreement and supported the group to take the lead in doing this as we went along and got more comfortable.”

“There was really well thought out prep for each session by facilitators.”

“The voice of participants was prioritised rather than the voice of facilitators.”

Justlife perspective

The two facilitators were from Justlife. Outside of the sessions, one of them took an overall lead on participation, including recruitment, group wellbeing, logistics, communication and payments. The other facilitator took the lead on research skills, including gathering and curating the technical training content and designing the research skills sessions (see Appendix E). They continued to adapt the training modules as the group progressed, based on the needs and ideas that came out of the sessions. Facilitators took turns being the lead trainers for each training session, and both held space in the room during check-ins and check-outs and the lively group discussions and critiquing that would take place. It was a supportive, conversational and reflective atmosphere, for peers and facilitators.

“...It also meant us facilitators could check in with each other and give reflective feedback and support to each other.”

Group process

Peer perspective

We set ground rules and revisited them, with check-ins and check-outs, and worked in a mix of pair and group work as well as open conversation. As a small group, we could work through issues and get to the “performing” stage quickly. Having openly communicated goals to work towards really helped.

“In the first session boundaries were set explicitly. We had icebreakers to get to know each other.”

“It was a cooperative space rather than a competitive one – this is really rare.”

“It is a comfortable feeling space.”

“There was a lot of respect in this group – This really grew over time together.”

Payment

Peer perspective

Respecting people enough to pay them for their time not only enables them to be there but also helps create a cohesive and committed group. It was great to have options – cash, bank transfers or vouchers.

“Self-reflection throughout, including paid time outside of sessions for this.”

“This is about trust. We were paid for self-reflection time without having to prove what we've done. It was all done on trust.”

Justlife perspective

By reimbursing people we're not just enabling them to be involved in a project that simply couldn't run without them, we're also recognising the value of the person's time and creating a two-way relationship.

Joy and Fun

Peer perspective

Humour, joy and fun helped hold some of the more difficult moments and content in a humanising way and created a feeling of warmth, care, respect and equality between the group.

“People can be themselves!”

“We’ve had a lot of fun! So many in-jokes.”

“Flexibility - joking happened a lot in this group and it really helped the social element. Sometimes veering us slightly off course but space was always made for the humour of the group to flow (while returning us to the point in good time).”

Justlife perspective

The fun we had in the group is a testament to the trust and care that developed between us all. Not all groups will bond in the same way, but being able to share a laugh helped us deal with some hard-hitting and challenging topics.

APPENDICES

- A. Project Information Pack
- B. Lived Experience Reward Policy
- C. Our ground rules/group agreement
- D. Project timetable - a full list of each session
- E. Sample slides, worksheets and questions from our sessions
 - vii. Research methods and ethics slides and task
 - viii. Ethics worksheet
 - ix. Reflective prompts for self-guided sessions
 - x. Identifying personal skills workshop
 - xi. Insider/outsider workshop
 - xii. Research questions for testing out research methods task

A. Project Information Pack

PEER RESEARCHER PILOT – INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES IN TA

We're looking for people with lived experience of homelessness in temporary accommodation (TA) or emergency accommodation (EA) and an interest in intersectionality and research to join our paid peer researcher pilot group.

The problem we will be addressing: There is currently a 'one-size fits all' to service design (one offer of E/TA irrespective of intersectionality)

What will you be doing?

We will be developing and testing ideas around how to gather community knowledge of temporary and emergency accommodation. We believe that community first-hand knowledge is key for local councils, support services and policymakers to fully understand all groups impacted by E/TA, leading to better support and interventions.

You will be learning what it means to be a peer researcher, including research ethics and about different types of research methods. We will experiment with these methods to see how we can work with those experiencing homelessness in E/TA who face intersectional problems while homeless.

This is a short pilot project looking at how we can use research to plug the gaps in the existing understanding of E/TA, but we hope this could lead to a larger, more long-term project. The project has set aims, but we are looking forward to working together to develop our group agreement and our understanding of intersectionality.

What are the set aims?

- To develop and experiment with new research methods that can be used to work with people who have intersectional needs while staying in TA or EA
- To record and share our findings
- To co-produce the process of how the peer group will work

What will you be offered?

This is a paid position of £15 per hour, please read our Lived Experience Policy for more information about this. In addition to the skills you will learn from your involvement, there will be additional training and coaching opportunities.



Part One

Your involvement

How will this group be facilitated and how will you be supported?

The Justlife Research and Policy team will facilitate this group – Alex Procter who is the Lived Experience Lead with a background in creative participation as well as peer knowledge, and Signe Gosmann who is a Network Development and Researcher with a background in participatory research and co-production. The first session will be facilitated by Christa, our Head of Research, Policy and Communications,

Both will facilitate the weekly groups in a way that best supports the group in achieving its goals and working together.

Outside of the group, Alex is coordinating the running of this project and the support of those involved. As part of that, you can arrange extra one-to-one check-ins with her if this would be of use to you while you are in the project, and she can also support you with any accessibility needs you may have. We cannot offer support outside of this project's scope, but we can signpost you to other services if need be.

What practical skills will you get out of being involved?

We will support you as a peer researcher to develop research skills. The skills you will learn may be “creative” based, such as poetry, or visual, or they may be more conversational such as peer interviews, or focus groups – it depends on what we decide as a group.

As we carry out this process there will be some stages which are part of most research processes and will be transferable skills for anyone interested in developing as researchers. Alex and Signe will provide training and facilitation on these topics as we carry them out. They include:

- Creating definitions for research
- Ethics in research
- Types of research – different approaches and skills
- Presentations of research findings and knowledge sharing

Our partners the Young Foundation are providing coaching and learning sessions focused on community-led research. These will be open to all participants. Topics include how to build community movements, research methods and more.

Is this a paid role?

Yes. The hourly rate will be £15 per hour. However, we want to make sure the payment you receive works for you, and as such you can be paid directly for your time or rewarded with vouchers. We will agree with each participant individually on how you want to be recognised for your time when you join the project.

Most homelessness research is carried out by people without lived experience, and with little regard to how intersecting identities can shape the experience. We want to change this with your help!

B. Our Lived Experience reward policy

Justlife Lived Experience Reward and Expenses Policy (as of November 2023)

Introduction

Justlife is committed to working with people with lived experience of homelessness, to improve our projects and outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. This aligns with our strategic plan and ensures that those we support are at the heart of our service design and development.

Part of this commitment is the recognition that people with lived experience should be rewarded for sharing their expertise and time and ensuring all expenses are reimbursed.

Purpose

This policy has been created to provide clear guidance on how Justlife will reward experienced participants and what rewards will be provided. Justlife will ensure there is a paper trail for giving cash/gifts so everyone is clear on how the system works.

Who is eligible for a Lived Experience Reward?

All people who have lived experience of homelessness and are supporting a Justlife project are eligible to receive rewards. This includes people with experience in addition to those currently experiencing homelessness.

Levels of participation and reward

Participation Activity	Reward
Providing Feedback	£15 gift voucher if 30 minutes or over
Interview Respondent (research)	£15 gift voucher
Interview Panel	£15 per hour bank transfer/gift voucher
Peer Researcher	£15 per hour bank transfer/gift voucher
Co-Production Workshop(s)	£15 per hour bank transfer/gift voucher

Steering Group Meeting	£15 per hour bank transfer/gift voucher
Training	£15 per hour bank transfer/gift voucher

Methods of reward

On the initial meeting with a lived experience participant, the method and frequency of reward will be agreed upon and recorded with each project manager/team. This will be flexible should the participant wish to change award details in the future.

Bank transfer – paid monthly at the end of the month

The participant will need to fill out our Bank Account Details form for the project team to return to the Justlife Finance office to be paid

Vouchers

gifted to participants at the end of each session and added to the internal reward log

Rewards and Benefits

It is the responsibility of the participant to inform the Jobcentre/DWP that they are participating in this project, declare any cash rewards and find out if this may affect the benefits they are receiving.

For participants who opt for voucher gifts, this does not need to be declared, however, it is the responsibility of the participant to let the relevant bodies know that they are volunteering for this role if required.

Payment for expenses will not need to be declared and will not affect the benefits of participants.

Payment for Training

Lived Experience participants will be rewarded for any training they participate in; this can be via cash payment or gift voucher.

Declining payment

Participants can decline payment if they so wish.

Expenses

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Travel to and from meetings/workshops

- Stationery required for meetings/workshops
- Food and drink required during meetings/workshops
- Carer/keyworker accompaniment to meetings/workshops
- Childcare costs
- Interpretation costs

Wherever possible Justlife will book and pay for items classed as expenses to avoid any initial costs to participants. Where this is not possible and out-of-pocket expenses are incurred, receipts should be retained and supplied to the relevant project team for reimbursement. All expenses should be agreed in advance with the project team.

Payment and expenses reimbursement process

Payment method and frequency agreed upon with the participant at the initial one-to-one meeting. This can be changed at a later date as per the participant's wishes.

At the end of each session, weekly or monthly (as per the participant's request) on receipt of a timesheet (this can be filled out by the participant or together with a member of the project team) or recorded attendance list completed by the project team member, payment will be issued by the previously agreed method. A log of all payments will be kept by the project team.

If expenses cannot be paid in advance by the project team, expenses will be reimbursed by either cash or bank transfer as per the participant's request. Receipts must be made available to the project team, who will keep a record of all expenses.

Volunteering

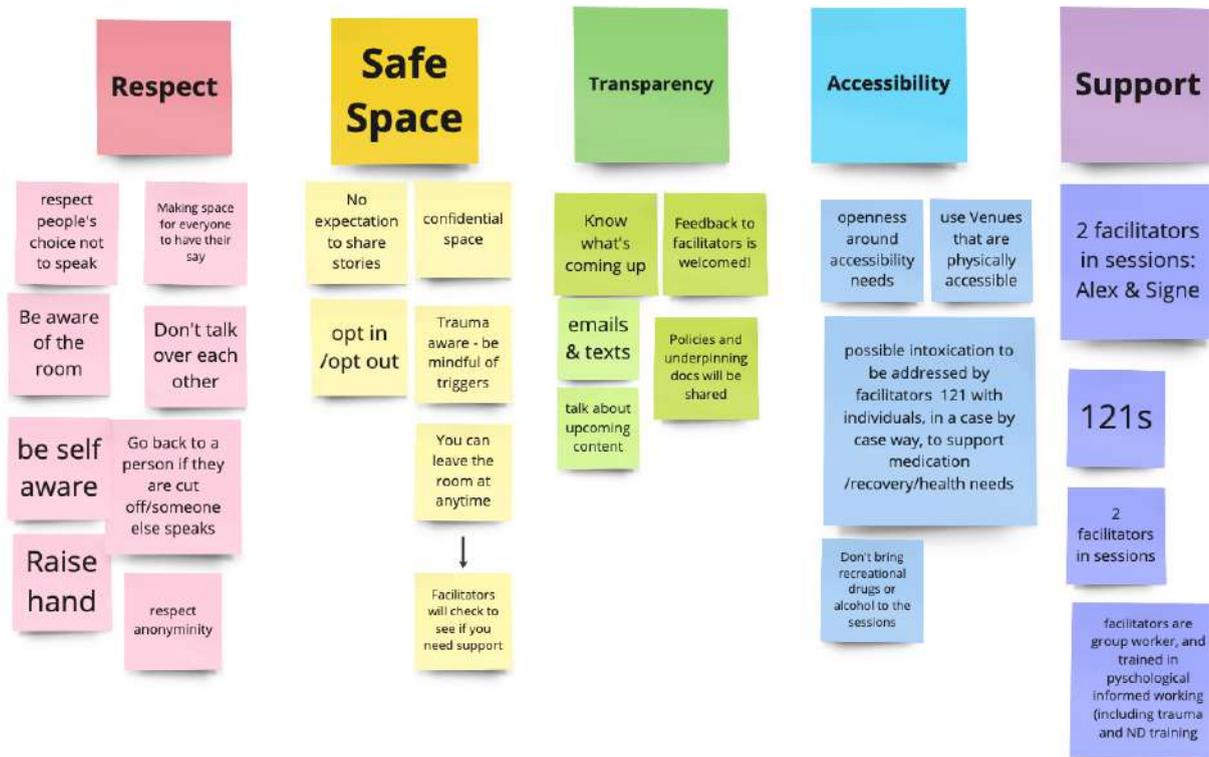
Those receiving lived experience payments as outlined in this policy would not be considered volunteers because they are providing specific expertise for project design and development.

A Justlife Volunteer is someone who freely gives their time, effort and talent to contribute toward the mission, vision, and values of Justlife, without concern for financial gain. To find out more, please see Justlife's Volunteer Policy.

Policy review date: 30/04/24

C. Our Ground rules/Group agreement

Version 1



D. Project timetable – a full list of each session and aims

Session 1 – Group agreement and intro session

Aim of this session = Group meet each other, ask questions collectively, and consider how they will work together.

Session 2 – Introduction to research and research skills

Aim of this session = Group are introduced to the key concepts in research. Group are given overview of what research skills are.

Session 3 – Intersectionality as a frame of reference

Aim of this session = Group introduced to the concept of intersectionality, ideas of power and asked to consider why this might be important in research. Group introduced the idea of equity.

Self-led task 1 – Reflection – intersectionality in research

Aim of this session = Group asked to reflect on the process so far. What's connected with them, what hasn't. Group given sketchbooks/journals/materials for reflection.

Session 4 – Ethics

Aim of this session = Introduce the group to the idea of ethics as a concept and applied practice, within research and peer research specifically. Personal ethics and boundaries, and institutional ethics.

Self-led task 2 – Reflection – ethics and intersectionality

Aim of this session = Group asked to pick a dummy run question, and run it through our ethics worksheet, in order to see how many angles must be considered

Session 5 – Ethics in peer research

Aim of this session = Deeper dive into ethics and discussion from self-reflection. Giving space for people's personal thoughts around their boundaries to arise.

Session 6 – Personal skills in research

Aim of this session = Group discuss and recognise the skills that are already in the room.

Session 7 – Research methodologies

Aim of this session = Talk to the group about constructing research methodologies – pulling together the idea of a research question, ethics and scale. Go through this practice in the room.

Self-led task 3 – Test out a research method/construct a methodology to answer a pretend research question

Aim of this session = Everyone goes and tests out a mini research method/methodology using a pretend question

Session 8 – Insider/outsider – the nature of peer research

Aim of this session = People understand the difference between insider/outsider positions in research, and how that relates to their work and as a peer researcher

Self-led task – Develop your research question/methodology

Aim of this session = People spend time out of the room thinking about what research they want to do

Sessions 9 and 10 – Shaping the group's research questions

Two final sessions to shape a cohesive research theme or question, ready to start research

E. Sample slides, worksheets and questions from our sessions

E.i Research methods and ethics slides and task (text only)

<h4>Why do we do research?</h4> <p>Gaining knowledge and insight In order to change procedures, rules, conditions... Influence decision making Give voice and visibility to those less heard To build evidence for a campaign To test ideas Other?</p>	<h4>Quantitative, Qualitative and Desk Research</h4> <p><u>Quantitative</u> data is numbers-based, countable, or measurable. Quantitative data tells us how many, how much, or how often in calculations.</p> <p><u>Qualitative</u> data is interpretation-based, descriptive, and relating to language. Qualitative data can help us to understand why, how, or what happened behind certain behaviours.</p> <p><u>Desk research</u> can be either. It involves reading what is already written and published on your chosen subject. Sources include libraries, the media and general internet searches. Google Scholar is a good search tool for academic publications. Some researchers will put together a literature review that summarises their findings</p>
<h4>Scale</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big or small sample group • One off - point in time • Longitudinal, establish baseline to measure against • Comparative, measure between areas for example or different population groups 	<h4>Quantitative Research</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Surveys ✓ Opinion polls ✓ Counts ✓ Freedom of Information (FOI)

“No evidence of institutional racism in UK, says report commissioned by government”

(Channel 4, 31 Mar 2021)

“Black women are nearly four times more likely than white women to die within six weeks of giving birth, with Asian women 1.8 times more likely, according to UK figures for 2018-20”

(BBC News, 18th April 2023)

Qualitative Research

- Methods
 - ✓ Interviews (structured, semi-structured, open)
 - ✓ Focus groups
 - ✓ Case studies
 - ✓ Fieldwork/ ethnographic
 - ✓ Oral histories
- Mixed methods
- Participatory Research and Creative Research Methods

Creative Research Methods

- Can be a good way to engage research participants more meaningfully
- Can be fun and a way to build trust, rapport and put people at ease
- Often don't require literacy
- Take time and effort to do well
- Don't work for everyone!
- The creative output is not necessarily the end goal – the process and conversation around it will reveal much more depth about the topic/ person
- Don't forget to record the discussion! Recording or notes

Rivers of Life

- A storytelling technique plotting key moments and people along a person's life journey
- Structured, participant-led and visual
- Can look at past, present and future

Mapping

- Useful for people who you struggle to get to talk
- Can identify services used, places interacted with locally
- Can be an existing map or one created in collaboration

Lego Serious Play

- Facilitation technique developed by Lego
- Can use other building materials
- Older people tend to hate it but anyone else gets on board
- Useful when asking someone to describe a state e.g. a future vision of what their life will be

Photovoices

- Allows participants to represent themselves and their own story
- Doesn't require literacy skills
- Can be for both documentary and creative expression
- Low cost
- Phones make this easier

Arts-based methods

- Images can create powerful stimulus for provoking a response
- Helpful for discovering emotions
- Useful prompt for deeper discussion
- Can include drawing, collage, photography etc...

Walking tours

- Good for place-based research
- Tour a neighbourhood/ place
- Take photos or record video/ audio
- Stop for a drink
- Don't stop – dig deeper to get beyond the obvious

Diary Keeping

- Can be visual, audio, written
- A good prompt for discussion around habits
- More accurate than recall
- Time consuming for diary-keeper

Considerations, whatever you do

- How does it help answer your research question?
- Time
- Resources
- How are you going to record your findings?
- Suitability of methods

What is the impact on the people we involve in our research?

- No matter your intention, you're responsible for your impact
- Be Trauma Informed
- Anonymity
- Consent
- Safety for all

Why Peer Research

- Access to 'less heard' voices
- Participants may trust the peer researcher more than other researchers
- Adding value through 'lived experience'
- Benefits to peer researchers
- Good peer research involves peer researchers in design and delivery
- Peer research aims to reveal authentic insights into people's lives and experiences, which non-peer 'academic' researchers can struggle to gain.
- It is about research being done **with** and **for** people, rather than **to** and **about** them
- Other?

Research methods task: Pick a question – pick a methodology

- How many orange people live in TA in England?
- What is life like for green people under 18 staying in TA?
- Have conditions in TA improved for striped people in TA since the government pledged to improve services for striped people experiencing homelessness three years ago?
- Are purple people more likely to become homeless than orange people? Why?
- How can services be improved for multi-coloured people in TA?
- Do people of all colours feel listened to in TA?
- What does the local service provision look like for residents of Swan House?

Ask the group to get into pairs, and using what they've learnt today draft out what a research methodology for one of these questions could look like.

E.ii. Ethics worksheets

Once we had introduced the idea of ethics in sessions 2-3, we gave the group a self-guided task to take a pretend research question and think about it in this framework, to experience how ethics and methodology design are intrinsically inked.

Research Question



Who will we be working with?

Whats the scale?



What challenges might this present?

What challenges might this present?



What research methodologies would work best to address the question and the challenges?

Research Question

Research Methodology

Possible challenges or risks to research participants

How to mitigate them

Possible challenges or risks to me (researcher)

E.iii Reflective prompts for self-guided sessions

A selection of the questions we gave out for self-guided reflection sessions 1-2. We handed out journals in session 1, so that people could begin to build reflection between sessions into their research practice, and these questions could be referred to at any time to help them steer their reflective practice.

Guiding Questions for Reflection

There are no right or wrong answers, see these more as guiding questions to prompt your thoughts. You can pick and choose which you want to think about.

We'll be building on these questions when we return to our session on (insert DATE). You don't need to share what you write or hand anything in unless you want to of course.

Why do you want to research? What draws you to it?

In what ways do you think research might empower and build equity?

In what ways do you think research might disempower?

What aspects of research would you like to learn more about?

What does intersectionality mean to you? Is it relatable to your experience?

How would you define intersectionality?

What are the ethical challenges of any research?

What are the ethical challenges to peer research?

What are your personal hopes, fears and needs in this research project?

E.IV Identifying Personal Skills workshop

PART ONE

Identifying our skills

Get into pairs

1 minute: All think about what skills you bring to the process of research

Person 1:

2.5 minutes: person 1 talks and person 2 listens

1 minute: person 2 reflects back

SWAP

Person 2:

2.5 minutes: person 2 talks and person 1 listens

1 minute: person 1 reflects back

GROUP

Share for 15: facilitator captures the words and themes emerging about the group's strengths, creating a peer research strength dossier!

PART TWO

Which methodologies suit your skills and draw you?

A hat full of different types of research methods.

A volunteer pulls a method out of a hat - the group then answers:

- What type of research would that method be suited for
- Which of your skills might suit this task, or would you delegate it?

E.V. Insider/outsider workshop

Thinking about the nature of peer research through the lens of being an insider or outsider of a group.

Useful materials to share beforehand to get the group thinking about the concept of insider-outsider in research include these articles:

A short article giving an overview of the difference between the two positions (insider or outsider) in a group while carrying out healthcare research, and some of the advantages and disadvantages. There's also an audio recording of the article.

[Guest Blog – The insider debate in qualitative research – should there be one? - DEMENTIA RESEARCHER \(nih.ac.uk\)](#)

An open-access reflective academic paper on the researchers' first-hand experience of being an outsider and an insider. More chewy and academic but interesting to hear their reflections.

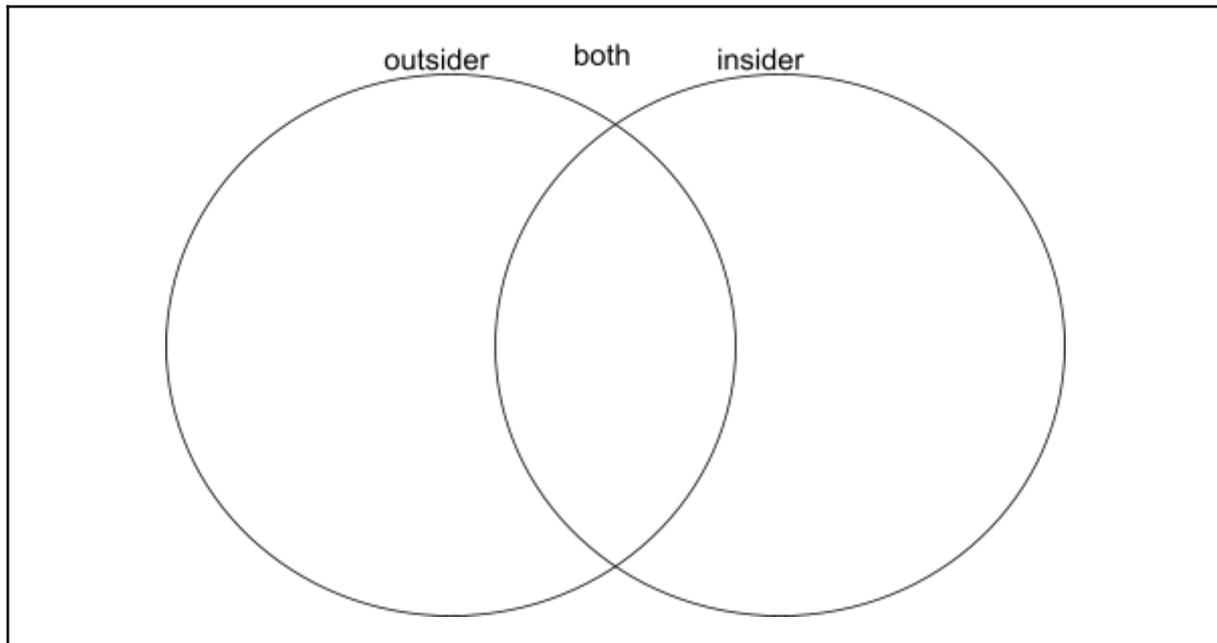
[The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research - Sonya Corbin Dwyer, Jennifer L. Buckle, 2009 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

Full group

20 mins: Facilitators introduce the idea of insiders and outsiders in research, with examples of the types of research.

10 mins: group question: is peer research insider or outsider, or a bit of both?

Activity: full group. Using a 2 circle Ven diagram, discuss the pros and cons of both insider and outsider research, and also consider the pros and cons of research that is both



E.VI Research questions for testing out research methods task

These questions we gave out to the group in session 6 for a week of self study. The aim was to give them time and space to test out using research methods independently, with a loose structure that could guide them and they could report back on, but on topics that were simple and 'safe'. The idea here was to build up the 'feeling' and learning of what's involved in preparing to carry out research, without the potentially triggering and more complex content of research on our topic of homelessness.

Please pick one of these questions and one or two research methods.

1. What is the desert most commonly given with school dinners in English primary schools?
2. How many of your friends* prefer apples over pears? Why?
3. How often are seagulls successful in stealing food from people on Brighton beach in any given hour? Do they go for particular food items?
4. Which are the preferred places to get ice cream for your friends* in Brighton, and how do they get there? Why?
5. How many cafes are there in Brighton?

6. How do your friends feel* about cooking?
7. How often do your friends* eat something sugary during the day? When?
8. What does the perfect cafe look like to your friends*?

***This is intentionally vague. You chose a group of people.**

Research methods you could pick include:

- Desk research
- Semi-structured interview
- Survey
- Focus Group
- Case Study
- Rivers of life
- Mapping
- Photovoices
- Arts-based methods
- Lego serious play
- Diary keeping
- Count
- Opinion poll