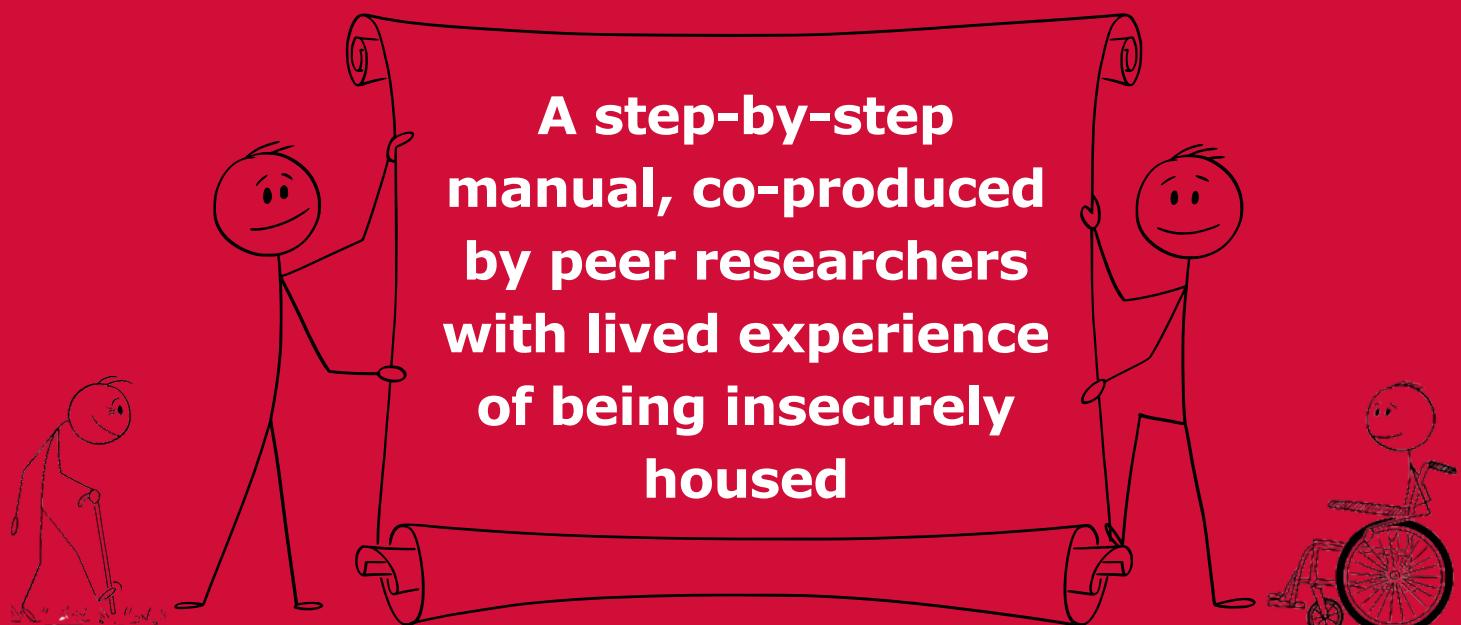


HOW TO SET UP A PEER RESEARCH GROUP



**A step-by-step
manual, co-produced
by peer researchers
with lived experience
of being insecurely
housed**



This manual is dedicated to Jude, a kind, intelligent, and deeply inquisitive soul who made the world brighter with their patience, humour, and generosity. Their legacy lives on in the spirit of this work and in the hearts of all who had the privilege to know them.

Acknowledgements

Justlife: Supports individuals who are experiencing hidden homelessness and living in temporary accommodation.

- **Justlife Peer Research Group 1 (Pilot):** James Ashley, Dee Bankhead, Jude Fletcher, Signe Gosmann, Rob Jones, Alex Procter, Casey Sailor.
- **Justlife Peer Research Group 2:** Jon Bailey, Gail Butler, Emma, Andy Geer, Rawand Mohamed, Asta Sa.

Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice (University of Southampton): Integrates research, training, and practice to improve services for people experiencing homelessness.

- Chloe Archdale, Jamie Glasspool, Charlie Radbourne, Loretta Shaw, Jennifer Tarabay, Dr Becky Ward, Adam, Mark.

Rise: An independent Brighton-based charity helping people affected by domestic abuse, offering practical support, advice, and refuge accommodation.

- Kirsty Brewster-Brown, Caroline Burrows, Emma Florio, Dr Lucy Hadfield, Natalia James, Radhika Pradhan.

We would like to give special thanks to the first group of peer researchers who took part in the pilot project and devised and co-authored the first version of this manual. Your dedication to the process and the ripple effects of your work will continue to spark meaningful connections, knowledge generation and social change.

While all peer researchers in this project, who have tested the manual, have first-hand experience of being insecurely housed, the original manual has been used in other settings to help establish lived experience and peer research groups with various intersectional groups, including migrants, domestic abuse survivors, gambling harms, the criminal justice system, LGBTQ+ communities, homelessness and recovery, and survivors of trauma, torture, and trafficking. It has reached England, Wales, Scotland, Poland, Spain, and the Netherlands.

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.

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Foreword from the CEO

This Peer Research Manual has been co-produced by four groups of peer researchers with lived experience of homelessness. Over two years, peer researchers worked alongside our research team and other partners to test, reflect on, and refine a way of conducting peer research that prioritises safety, flexibility and trust.

What you'll find here is a practical yet thorough step-by-step guide to setting up your own peer research group, covering everything from recruitment and accessibility to group sessions, ethics, and safety. It also includes an accompanying workbook, session plans, and direct reflections from each of the peer research groups who have been part of the journey, offering tools that are flexible and adaptable to different contexts. And all of it is practical, honest, and based on real experience.

So why does all of this matter? Because when people with lived experience lead the way, the insights are richer, the relationships are stronger, and the impact is deeper. Marginalised voices that often go unheard are given space to not just be heard but to contribute and drive positive change. Across the board, peer research makes space for people who are often excluded to shape the systems that affect them – not just as participants, but as decision-makers.

At Justlife, we're committed to supporting and championing work that is person-centred, collaborative and innovative. We believe that putting lived experience at the heart of work with people living in Temporary Accommodation ensures better outcomes for everyone involved and strengthens all our organisations.

This manual shows how that can look in practice – not just for us, but for all organisations looking to adopt this approach, whether working in homelessness or not. It celebrates the creativity, expertise, generosity and dedication of the peer researchers who helped shape it, and we're proud to share what has come out of this process.

Simon Gale



CEO, Justlife

Introduction

The development of this manual began in early 2023 with a pilot peer research group in Brighton, funded by The Young Foundation. Driven by a desire to create a lasting legacy, the group co-created the first draft of this manual, recognising the value of their experiences and insights gained throughout their peer research journey. Since then, the manual has been tested and refined by the following organisations' peer research groups:

- Justlife Group 2
- RISE
- University of Southampton

Peer Researcher Insights

Throughout the manual, you will find words in **teal** and quotes from peer researchers, presented in speech bubbles, sharing first-hand insights and reflections on our experiences. These personal accounts offer valuable context and inspiration as you progress through the manual.

Purpose of the Manual

This manual is a co-created guide to setting up a peer research group. We aim to provide a foundation that ensures successful community-led projects are safe, ethical, equitable, accessible, and productive.

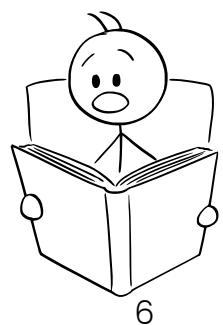
The steps in this guide are based on techniques that have been tried and tested across various settings, geographical locations, and among people with diverse intersectional experiences and identities. They incorporate valuable feedback from peer researchers, ensuring they are well-suited for future groups to achieve meaningful and impactful outcomes.

Who is the Manual for?

The manual is designed for organisations and research institutions interested in establishing their own peer research projects, for facilitators who will be supporting the peer research group, and for the peers involved in such projects. Its primary aim is to guide the transition from 'peer' to 'peer researcher'. It does not serve as a guide for conducting peer research itself but rather prepares peers to engage meaningfully and safely in future research activities.

What is Peer Research?

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting the research. It aims to empower people to effect positive change by participating in research on their own communities.¹



¹ The Young Foundation. (n.d.) 'What is peer research?', The Young Foundation. Available at: <https://www.youngfoundation.org/peer-research-network/about/what-is-peer-research/> (Accessed: 7 March 2025).

Why Peer Research?

The peers who contributed to the development of this manual shared valuable insights into the positive impact of peer research. Their reflections highlight the following benefits:

- **Empowering:** Peer research builds capacity and equips individuals with the **skills**, **knowledge**, and confidence to critically **challenge information**, participate in research, and engage in advocacy.
- **Accessible:** By **demystifying traditional research**, peer research ensures that people with lived experience are included in the research design, as well as enabling individuals to understand and engage with research relevant to their lives.
- **Create space for different approaches:** Peer research not only helps make research more accessible but also challenges conventional methods by valuing lived experience perspectives and ways of working. This approach actively **creates space for less conventional**, community-led methodologies.
- **Unique insights:** Involving individuals with lived experience brings forward perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, amplifying marginalised voices and enhancing representation.
- **Trust building:** Peer research fosters **trust** between decision-makers and communities, leading to better-informed policies grounded in authentic insights.
- **Purpose:** Participation offers a sense of purpose, **improving self-esteem** and **well-being** when peers are involved with clear objectives and shared power.
- **Evidence for change:** Peer researchers gather evidence that can drive meaningful **change**, shaping policy and practice to address community-specific issues.
- **Building capacity:** This approach strengthens research capacity within communities, supporting sustainable development and problem-solving.
- **Networking:** Peer research encourages collaboration across communities, professionals, and decision-makers, **uncovering hidden talents and fostering connections** that can lead to policy shifts and workforce enrichment.

PART 1: Setting up a Peer Research Group

This part of the manual is set out as a step-by-step guide to take you through the key issues to consider when setting up a peer research group. Each step is addressed separately and includes questions that we would encourage anyone to consider when going through this process.

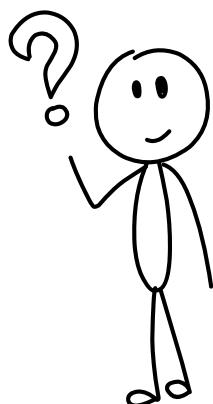
Preparing and Planning

A key consideration when starting a peer research project is to think about your motivation.

Think about:

- Whether you are you looking to gain new insights, collaborate on a shared problem, empower your participants or work more collaboratively?
- How will you capture, facilitate and utilise unique insights and what purpose does gaining these serve?
- What are some gaps in traditional research, which peer research might reach?

Is what you're getting worth the time / energy / emotion / resource commitment. Is there a safer, more thorough way? Do you have to trade some of these things off for others?



Once you're clear on your motivation and purpose for the project, there are some basic things you will need. On the next page is a checklist of things to consider. 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.

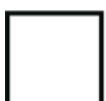
Feel free to personalise this list based on your specific context; consider it a starting point.



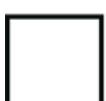
Focus: A general idea of the area of research and who you want to work with.



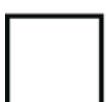
Budget: In addition to staff and venue costs, peers and participants should be reimbursed for their time, as well as having a budget for basic stationery resources, IT equipment, and snacks.



Time: Time to give to the group learning and process, and to provide support to the people involved in your project.

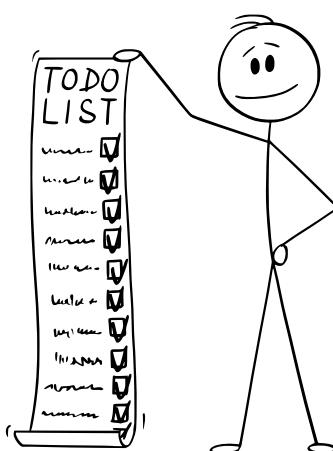


People: At least two facilitators to run the peer research group sessions². One person should always be on hand to step out and provide support if a peer needs private support. Facilitators with research and facilitation skills are recommended.



Policies: You will need the relevant safeguarding policies and guidelines on research ethics, which should be clear and accessible to everyone involved in the project. See Appendix C for our lived experience reward policy.

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!



Recruitment

When planning peer research, meaningful involvement is key. You should think about how, and to what extent, you can involve people. Roles, level of involvement and responsibility should be clearly set out and agreed at the beginning of the project.

Some people may want to dive right in and play a big role, while others might prefer to help out now and again. Offering a flexible approach, and making sure nobody feels pressured or left out, is key.

Reflect on the specific demographics and communities you aim to engage. What insights and experiences can the community provide? Will this project be beneficial to peer researchers, or could it raise any ethical concerns? Additionally, be mindful of any barriers to participation, such as time constraints or accessibility challenges.

We have found smaller peer research groups work better, so carefully consider how many people to involve in your project including how much support you can provide.

Be aware of preconceptions and bias—your assumptions about community priorities and experiences may not be accurate. Create space for peer researchers to shape the research, ensuring their perspectives guide the process.

People felt that the pre-meetings between each of them created a sense of safety, and knowing what to expect before arriving and having a familiar face there.

I liked that the group wasn't too large—it's the perfect size and easy to manage.



Initial One-to-One Meetings

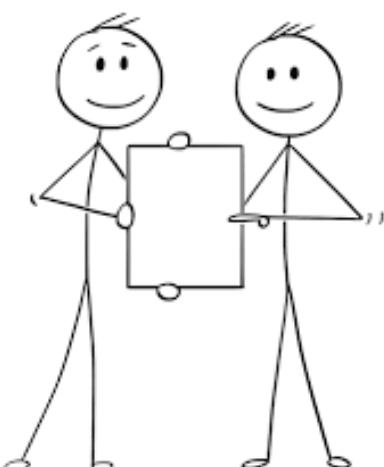
Initial one-to-one meetings give peers a chance to meet one of the team and feel a sense of connection to someone before entering the main group. For some peers, these pre-meetings play a key role in establishing a foundation of safety and comfort. For the facilitators, it can provide a chance to chat with the people who could be part of the project and assess if it feels like a good fit.

Each preliminary meeting will be shaped by the conversation and needs of the peer but could be guided by these rough aims:

- To strike up rapport and connection
- To find out what each person's goals and aspirations from being involved are
- 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.
- To find out how people find group settings and what people need to feel safe in a group.

Think about:

- 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 (i.e., if you already know individuals who will be involved!), include that. What might be barriers to their participation?
- How many peer researchers are you planning to form your peer research group?
- If you are recruiting from a small community where people may already know each other, how will you manage relationships, confidentiality, and any potential conflicts?
- Who will do what on the project? Include everyone, from organisational admin to the peer researchers. 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?



Lived Experience Payments

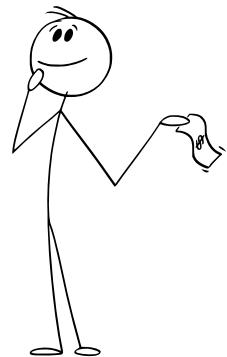
When considering payments for lived experience, it's crucial for organisations to ensure they have the financial capacity to provide fair and equitable pay. Without this, individuals may be excluded based on financial barriers rather than how valuable their contributions might be. Setting aside a specific budget can help create a more inclusive and representative involvement process.

Expenses

Expenses refer to any reasonable costs incurred while participating in involvement work, which must be directly related to the tasks performed. Organisations should clearly outline which expenses will be covered and communicate this clearly to peers and participants.

Examples of covered expenses:

- Public transport and fuel
- Parking and taxi costs
- Childcare and personal assistance
- Translation or interpretation services
- Meals, subsistence, and accommodation for overnight stays
- Equipment costs



Lived Experience Involvement

This type of involvement includes activities aimed at improving statutory services or research conducted with individuals who have lived experience. These activities are distinct from employment and are designed to enhance service delivery. Although payments for these contributions are considered earnings, they are not classified as employment and should not affect participants' benefit status.^{3,4} However, we recommend that each participant checks for themselves how such contributions interfere with any benefits they may receive.

Think about:

- How will you pay or reimburse your peers and participants, and have you allocated a budget specifically for these payments, including potential expenses?

³The Social Change Agency (2023) Payment for Involvement Playbook. London: The Social Change Agency. Available at: <https://9184296.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/9184296/Resources/Payment%20for%20Involvement%20Playbook/Payment%20for%20Involvement%20Playbook%20-The%20Social%20Change%20Agency.pdf> (Accessed: 16 September 2024).

⁴Trust for London. (2024) Safe ways of working with community partners and people with lived experience: Lessons from the Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners initiative. London: Trust for London. Available at: www.trustforlondon.org.uk (Accessed: 16 September 2024).

Being Wise with Time

Ample time and space for people to talk through their trauma.

Not everyone's time is worth the same, in general, use people's strengths, but be especially cognisant of the limits of using volunteers and peers. e.g...I'm not doing admin

Research has shown that working slowly is often the most psychologically accessible and trauma-informed way of running a participatory group⁵, as it gives people time to build trust, process information, 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.

Be as clear about the duration and frequency of meetings as you can, while providing flexibility to help suit your peers. Consider inclusive timings and adapt the format to accommodate different learning styles and commitments, ensuring an inclusive environment for all involved.⁶

Think about:

- Whether you planning to take days, weeks or months with your training?
- Whether you have the time and resources to structure meetings in a way that builds trust, accommodates different learning styles, and ensures psychological safety while preventing burnout?
- 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?



⁵ 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].

⁶ Trust for London (2024) Safe ways of working with community partners and people with lived experience: Lessons frm the Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners initiative. London: Trust for London. Available at: www.trustforlondon.org.uk (Accessed: 16 September 2024).

Accessibility

Accessibility is more than simply physically accessing a space; it is about removing barriers and being adaptable to people's needs to ensure no one is excluded. Sometimes these barriers are not obvious to all. While developing this manual, we discovered the following types of accessibility:

Logistical Accessibility

Consider logistical barriers people may have to attend. For example, when working with families, providing reliable childcare options is crucial to enabling attendance. Being close to childcare facilities can reduce travel time making it easier for parents to participate. Solutions that allow parents to stay near, or easily access, their children can also address a need for proximity and enhance comfort and involvement.

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 peers or participants, being close to a bus stop and having access to disabled parking may be preferable. Within the venue, **ensuring enough space to walk around** with easy exit routes is key. We also recommend having a **safe breakout space** where individuals can take a break.

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 Spectrum Condition or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which can include heightened sensory experiences. Sensory accessibility means considering things like sign language interpreters or Braille signs. It also could include **softer lighting** and a room that is away from sudden unexpected **noises**. **Avoiding strong smells, such as from room diffusers or harsh cleaning products, and using non-scented pens** can also make the environment more comfortable for those sensitive to scents. **Providing sensory toys** can also be beneficial, offering a way for individuals to self-regulate and manage sensory input. Adjustments like the option to **open or close windows** can also help regulate sensory input.

Accessible Content

To make learning more accessible, it's important to use a **suitable text size, font and colour contrast**, which helps people with visual impairments or dyslexia read more easily. Using images and videos can also make content more engaging and cater to different learning styles. Providing alternative text for images ensures everyone can understand them, while clearly organising information and using straightforward language supports better understanding for everyone.

Images and videos can be used to cater for different learning styles.

I would like the text size and font in the same style & colour contrast to make sure I can read it easily

Psychological Accessibility

This is about creating a welcoming and **safe space** 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**. Choosing spaces that do not feel like a service, but rather somewhere that feels comfortable and inviting, was crucial to us.

Digital Accessibility

Ensure digital accessibility by **providing materials in accessible formats, such as screen-readable documents and captions for videos**. Provide support for people who need assistance with digital tools and ensure all digital platforms are compatible with assistive technologies.

Think about:

- What kind of accessibility needs might there be in the group (peers, 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.

Think about:

- How will you build space and time for reflection for facilitators 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.

Trauma-Informed Support

Below are some key grounding techniques and stress regulation exercises used to manage trauma:

- **Square Breathing:** Inhale, hold, exhale, and pause for four seconds each, helping to regulate the nervous system and reduce anxiety and stress.
- **Paintbrush Breathing:** A visualisation technique where you imagine "painting" with your breath, calming both the mind and body.
- **5-4-3-2-1 Technique:** A sensory grounding method where you identify 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste, helping shift focus away from distressing thoughts.
- **Touch and Smell:** Engaging with sensory toys or calming scents such as essential oils can bring your awareness back to the present moment.

These techniques help reduce feelings of overwhelm, regulate emotional responses, and promote a sense of calm and control.⁸

Check-In and Check-Out

Check-in and check-out are essential practices that serve as a temperature check of the group, allowing everyone to voice their thoughts, feelings, and concerns at the beginning and end of each session. Check-in is a good time to share pronouns to foster a respectful and inclusive environment, promoting open communication, emotional well-being, and a sense of mutuality. Facilitators should also participate to encourage inclusivity. Check-ins help set the tone for the session, while check-outs provide an opportunity for reflection, ensuring everyone feels heard and fostering a sense of closure.

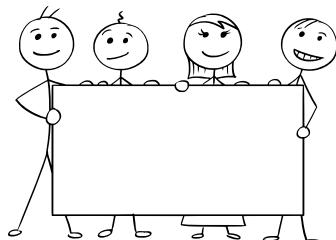
**Check in and outs
are essential and
work well**

⁸RISE UK. (2024). Get set to move for your mental health with grounding techniques. Available at: <https://www.riseuk.org.uk/news/2024/get-set-to-move-for-your-mental-health-with-grounding-techniques> (Accessed: 28 March 2025)

Co-Create a Group Agreement

Creating a 'Group Agreement' for working together, in the first session, covering behaviour, communication, accessibility, participation, content sharing and support needs, helps establish a **safe space**. This agreement can be displayed and evolve over time. While everyone shares responsibility for upholding the rules, facilitators play a key role in reminding the group, addressing breaches, and ensuring the rules foster a positive, inclusive dynamic. Facilitators should also monitor whether the rules continue to serve the group or need revisiting.

Group agreement was helpful in sessions as well



Maintain a Safe Environment

Create and maintain a safe environment by including designated breakout spaces where anyone can retreat if they feel overwhelmed or need a break. These spaces should be private, calming, and accessible (including physically, psychologically and sensorily), providing a safe space for people to regain composure or seek support as needed.

Flexible Engagement

Allow peer researchers the option to step back from the project including peer research sessions, events, interviews or focus groups if necessary, to respect people's boundaries and prevent people from being overwhelmed or causing re-traumatisation.

Choice and Control

Empower peers by offering choices about the questions they answer and the topics they engage with. Allow everyone to set their own boundaries and express their comfort levels, including knowing their triggers and having control over their participation.

Think about:

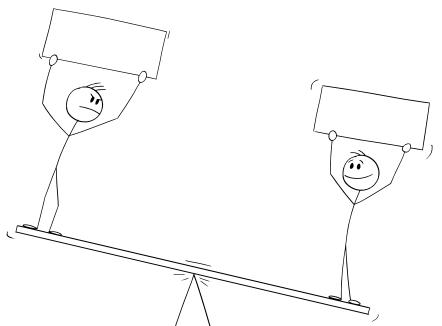
- If peer researchers decide they do not want contact with research participants, how will participants be supported in their involvement in the research process? Are facilitators available to sit with participants when they are completing the survey for example?
- What might be difficult topics for your peers and participants in this project? With this in mind, what kind of support will you realistically be able to offer?
- How to manage anonymity and confidentiality in small communities. Might the peer researchers know participants? If so, what steps can be taken to protect privacy and maintain trust?

Ethics

It is essential to consider ethics in any research project, whether with peers or not. This section outlines the ethical principles to bear in mind if you are considering conducting peer research.

We Don't dig deep! - Participants are more important than data.

Consent in research is an ongoing conversation. Establish a relationship to say that you are not okay with something.



- **Transparency:** Be open and honest by clearly informing peers and any research participants about the research's intentions, scope, and their roles. Ensure they understand how their involvement will be used and its relevance to the overall project. Be upfront about the limitations, the way the project is funded, the length of time the funding goes on for, and about when the end of the project will be.⁹ This transparency builds trust and supports informed consent.
- **Mutual Respect:** Interactions should be guided by a Trauma-Informed Approach, ensuring that everyone is treated with dignity, their boundaries are respected and their needs are addressed with sensitivity and care. Research relationships should be built with a commitment to ensuring that everyone acknowledges and listens to each other. Diverse perspectives, different forms of expertise and various ways of knowing, may hold equal importance in the research process.
- **Responsibility:** Be mindful of how your actions might impact others, even if your intentions are positive. It's helpful to be aware that trauma can influence participants and peers, and strive to minimise any unintentional negative impacts.

⁹Trust for London. (2024) Safe ways of working with community partners and people with lived experience: Lessons from the Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners initiative. London: Trust for London. Available at: www.trustforlondon.org.uk (Accessed: 16 September 2024).

Safety and Support

Conducting peer research involves navigating potentially difficult and triggering conversations, making it essential to prioritise support and safety.

We're all aware of the difficult nature of the topics we may encounter, and have some awareness of our own issues, but outside of outreach work, few people will be prepared for what may actually arise from hearing someone's story

One-to-One's

Offering one-to-ones for peers and participants to share their thoughts and concerns provides a more personalised and private opportunity for reflection and feedback, where peers and participants can raise any concerns they wouldn't want to raise in front of the group. This also helps the facilitators support the wellbeing of everyone and pick up on potential issues early. Asking peers and 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. These can be arranged before, during or after a session or particular activity such as an event.

- **Pre-Session Support:** Facilitate pre-session meetings or consultations to help participants and peers prepare and address any concerns. This proactive approach supports their readiness and comfort, contributing to a more supportive and trauma-sensitive environment.⁷
- **Ongoing Support:** Provide real-time support during sessions by being attentive to peers' and participants' needs and responding to any signs of distress. Facilitators should provide Trauma-Informed Care to offer appropriate and compassionate support throughout the process. One facilitator should be on hand to step out of the room into a breakout space to offer 1:1 support if needed.
- **Post-Session Support:** Schedule individual meetings with peers and participants to process their experiences. This may include debriefing sessions, access to mental health resources, or referrals to support services. Ensure peers and participants receive ongoing assistance as needed and feedback on their experience.

Facilitator Support

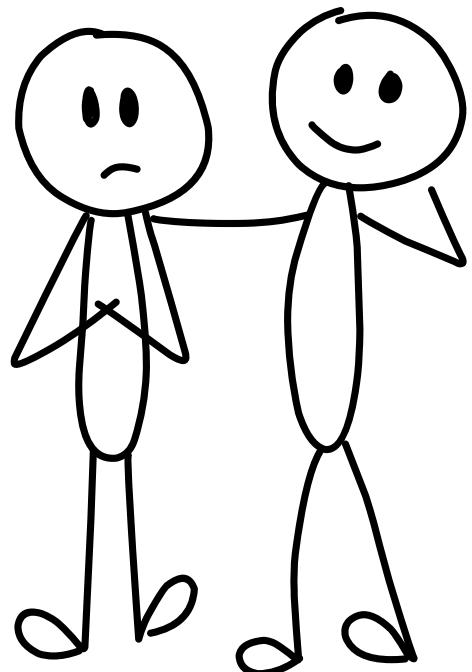
It is also important to provide facilitator support. Facilitating peer research can be emotionally, psychologically and intellectually demanding, with possible complex dynamics and challenges within the group. Reflecting on what happened in the sessions enhances the facilitators' well-being and enables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

- **Safety:** Prioritise everyone's physical and emotional safety and implement practices that protect individuals from harm and distress. In cases of imminent serious harm or threat to life, seek immediate support or call emergency services, even if this requires breaching confidentiality. No research objective should ever come before the safety of those involved.
- **Beneficence:** Researchers should make sure that the benefits of the study outweigh the risks. The primary aim should be to improve the lives of the community, whether directly or indirectly while protecting their physical, mental, and social well-being. The environment should not only be trauma-informed but also conducive to healing and positive change.

Feminist Participatory Research - the person being researched should be involved in the whole process from the start. Ask them what they need from this process, how does this benefit you so that everybody owns the project.

Suggestions for Ethical and Safe Research

- **Involve Participants Early:** Engage participants early in the research process to build trust and ensure their voices are heard in shaping the research. Consider the peer researchers researching on themselves.
- **Set Up an Ethics Committee:** Create a peer research ethics committee to oversee ethical standards and provide guidance on any difficult issues.
- **Train in Listening Skills:** Provide training to peer researchers on listening skills around how to hold the space, helping to create a safe, respectful, inclusive, and supportive environment.



Knowledge Exchange – Non-Extractive Research

Research is done with the participant, and not to the participant. Walk alongside the participant.

We think about how we can give back to participants.

Peer research thrives on [conversations and relationships where there is a bit of give and take, rather than being authoritative or extractive](#). This collaborative dynamic mirrors the essence of [storytelling and creativity](#), where everyone involved contributes meaningfully to the process.

In peer research, both peers and facilitators learn from each other, fostering mutual growth. This approach enables peers to acquire useful skills, such as understanding research methods and ethics, which they may or may not have. At the same time, researchers gain valuable insights, ensuring that the research is relevant and applicable to the topic. Crucially, it's about [working with each other in creating solutions](#). This helps empower individuals, honouring their autonomy and contributions.

Take the time to help peers appreciate the value of their input, building their confidence while creating an environment where open dialogue and exchange of ideas is encouraged. This [balanced give-and-take](#) approach ensures that both the research and the relationships involved are mutually beneficial.

Finally, consider what information and knowledge community projects require to engage effectively with decision-makers. Creating opportunities for further learning and skill development is key, ensuring that everyone involved can continue growing beyond the research itself.

Think about:

- What's in it for your peers and participants? What will they gain from their involvement?
- Think about what your output aims are. How will you credit your peers and participants or involve them at this stage?

Facilitating the Group

Social

In the first session, we recommend hosting a social event to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for everyone. This can take place at the beginning or end of the session, depending on your group's preference. The aim is to allow peers to get to know one another in a relaxed, informal setting. Doing so helps build rapport, ease any nervousness, and set a positive tone for future collaboration. By fostering a sense of community early on, peers are more likely to feel comfortable sharing ideas, asking questions, and fully engaging in the research process.

Having an informal social first would have helped ease into the space and limit any conflict.

Before the Session

A schedule of sorts (it can be fairly loose), including a break and clarity on who is facilitating which parts.

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

Session plan emailed to everyone with details of the venue

I liked knowing what the session was going to be about.
- Having emails before to prepare the mind.

Flexibility to attend the sessions and leave the room when you want.

Session Agenda

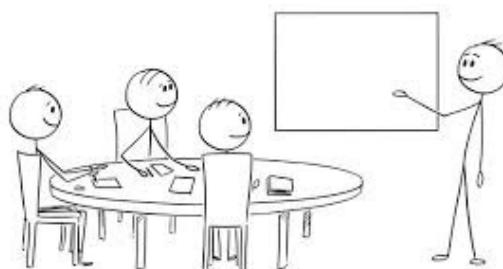
A session agenda is a key tool for facilitators and peers, helping to use the time wisely to keep everyone on track. Make it visible and engaging, such as a large, creative display at the front of the room. The agenda does not need to be rigid. Allow for flexibility in discussions or activities. However, having set times for breaks is important, even if peers are free to leave the room as needed.

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 everyone can openly share, express themselves, and engage in meaningful discussions without fear of judgement or disrespect. Crucially, space holding ensures that people feel **safe, held, and valued**, which is fundamental for promoting psychological safety and trust. Effective space-holding is essential in peer research to ensure that all voices are heard and respected throughout the process. Space holding formed the cornerstone of all our facilitation and was the key to effectively employing all the other methods.

In-Person Sessions

- Arrive on time to set up the room.
- Set up a breakout space where people can retreat if needed, as peer research can sometimes be upsetting. Do you know where this is?
- Familiarise yourself with the venue, including accessible toilets, fire procedures and escapes, and key contacts.
- Provide refreshments: biscuits, snacks, tea, coffee, etc.
- Ensure availability of pens, pencils, flipcharts, paper, and post-it notes.
- Check that IT equipment is ready.
- Have an invoice sheet or petty cash on hand for reimbursing peers and participants if needed.
- Display a copy of the group agreement.
- Ensure you have a phone or another means of being contacted if necessary.



Virtual Participation

- Offer virtual participation options for those who cannot attend in person or do not live locally.
- Choose venues with reliable Wi-Fi to ensure smooth online engagement.
- Provide materials in accessible formats, such as screen-readable documents and captioned videos.
- Support peers who may need assistance with digital tools and ensure all digital platforms are compatible with assistive technologies.

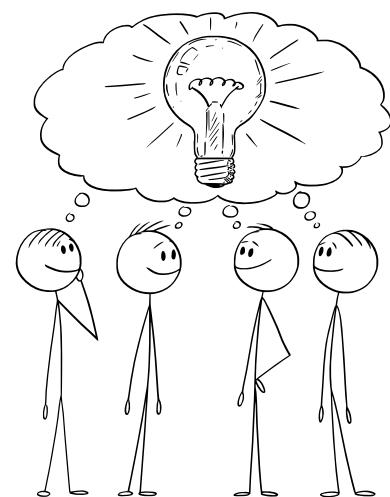
Hybrid Sessions

- Assign one facilitator to manage online interactions while another supports with the facilitation of people in the room.
- Use note-taking and lesson plans that are visible both online and in person to ensure everyone is included and engaged.

Remote working gives flexibility - [I] know [it's] not for everyone.

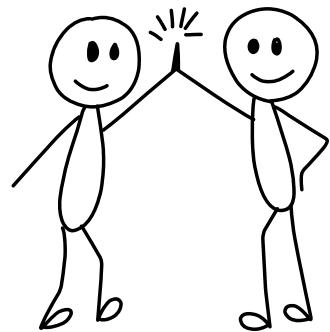
Group Discussion

Group discussion is a collaborative conversation among people in which they exchange ideas, experiences and perspectives on a particular topic or research question. It enables peers 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. This includes ensuring that everyone gets a reasonable amount of time to talk and also that no-one is being overwhelmed with attention. 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

Pairwork can be great for focused discussions or collaborative tasks. This approach encourages deeper exploration of topics, provides an opportunity for peers to share with a smaller audience, and creates the chance for more meaningful interactions. Pairwork can enhance participation, break down barriers, and facilitate more in-depth conversations within the larger group setting. Facilitators can support pairwork by checking in during the process, asking how the pair are getting on, and reflecting on what they hear, as well as keeping time.



It was great to work in pairs

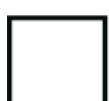
Think about:

- 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?
- What facilitation skills or techniques have facilitators used before? What might work in the context and why?

After each session:



Send a brief recap email to everyone



Any follow-up needed with peers and/or participants or other facilitators in line with your group agreement, safeguarding policies or based on any conversations you have had with individuals

Paid Self-Led Tasks

Allocating time for self-led tasks outside of your meeting time can deepen peers' 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.

Encouraging people to take ownership and value their reflections can lead to some profound personal insights,¹⁰ 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 peers and participants' time.

**I would never do
homework normally. But it
was so useful to this
process**

**I like the homework
aspect to give
reflection time.**

¹⁰ Mortari, L. (2015). Reflectivity in Research Practice: An Overview of Different Perspectives . International Journal of Qualitative Methods. [online] <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618045>.

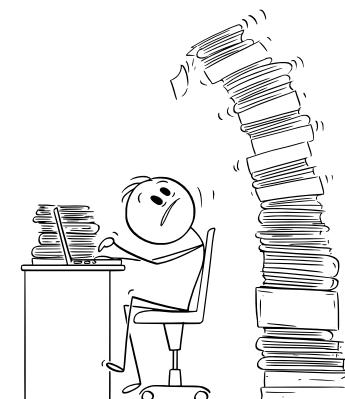
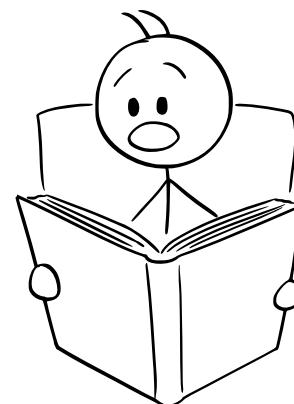
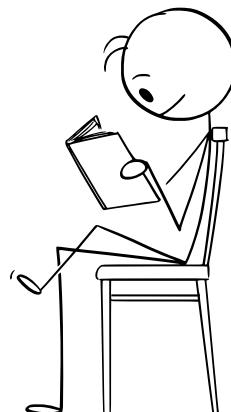
Part Two: Session Planning Guides

Welcome to the peer research workbook. In this section, we share the lesson plans and resources that we designed and tested. The sessions combine formal training with peer-led discussions, allowing peers to build research skills while providing space for reflection and exchange of ideas.

This workbook is designed to be flexible. Where difficult topics are introduced, we have used metaphors instead of diving straight into content that might be triggering, allowing discussions that would otherwise have been difficult. This may or may not work for you, so we encourage you to adapt the language, content, and structure to suit your group's specific needs.

This includes how much time all of you, peers and facilitators, can commit to the process. We've facilitated them as 12 individual workshops over a six month period, as well as a more condensed six-week programme. We also found that some topics needed more than one session, and other topics needed to be revisited at a later date.

In this experience, the facilitators conducted some sessions focused on teaching and learning, while others were discussion and reflection-based. We appreciated having both types.



Project Timetable

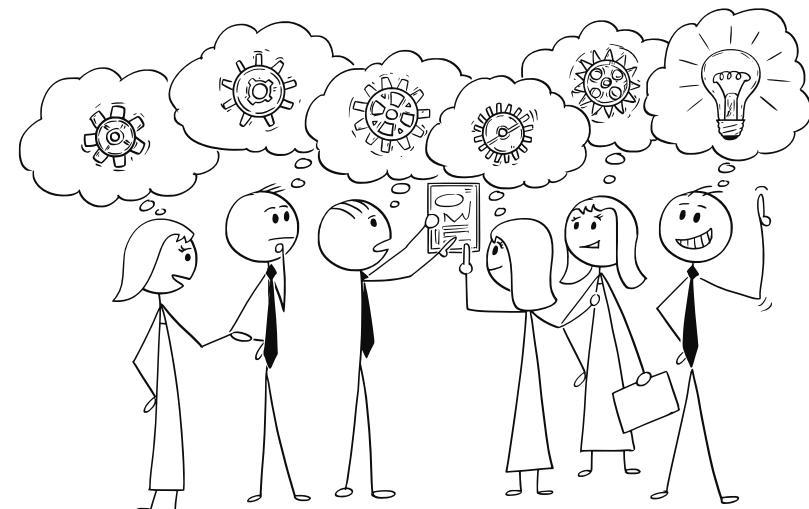
While we recommend the first session remain as suggested, feel free to order subsequent sessions based on your judgement and the group's needs, pace, and interests. Co-production remains essential throughout.

1. Group agreement and Introduction session

Group members meet and have an opportunity to ask questions and consider how to work together.

Our first session gave us the opportunity to meet each other and the members of group 1. we started our group agreement so we could all work together in a safe space, we are still adding to this as we learn more about the process.

It was a really important space for laying down ground rules, working out our accessibility needs, and logistics of the group.



2. Introduction to Research

Why do research? What can it do, and what can't it do? Introduction to different kinds of research, including peer research. We discuss the impact of research on individuals.

3. Research Methods

An introduction to different research methods that could be used in peer research, and reflections on how these could be used when doing our own research.

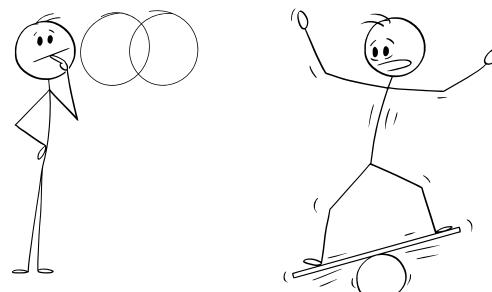
4. Ethics

An introduction to the idea of ethics as a concept, as well as the application in practice, within research and peer research specifically. Personal ethics and boundaries, and institutional ethics.

5. Insider/Outsider and Ethics in Peer Research

Our groups were introduced to the idea of insider/outsider positions in research, and how this relates to our work as a peer researcher.

**The complexity of research began to become apparent
(I learnt so much I hadn't considered that was involved in research, so many layers to it and so much thinking behind doing research more than just thinking of a question and asking it.)**

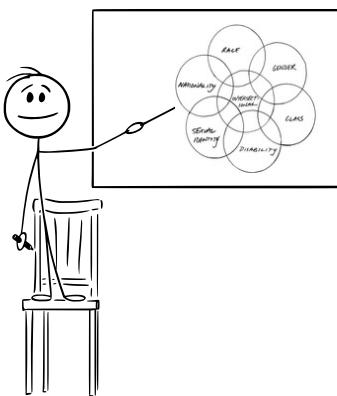


Really eye opening to learn about safety of researchers as well as the participants as something to think about

It helped us decide, we need to be aware of both perspectives. We need to be both, at certain points, and remain unbiased.

6. Intersectionality as a Frame of Reference

Our groups were introduced to the concept of intersectionality, and ideas of power and asked to consider why this might be important in research.

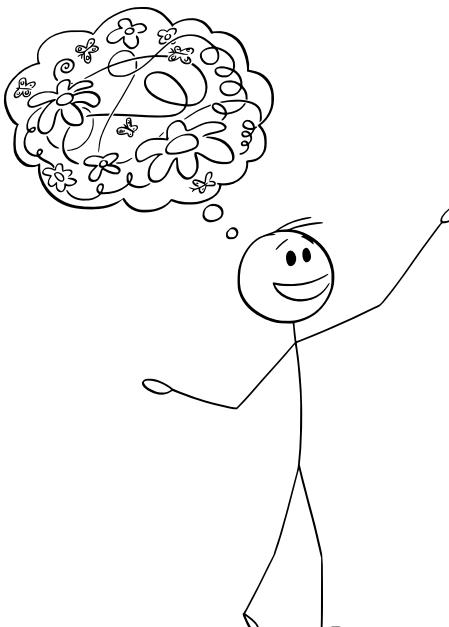


This is where our range of backgrounds really came into its own, we were all contributing and beginning to bring in personal perspectives in a relevant way. (And this was done and received really respectfully by everyone in the room)

7. Personal Skills in Research

Our groups discussed and recognised the skills that are already in the room.

When thinking about one's own skills, it might be better as a self-led activity, so you don't have to speak about it openly. Do it in your comfort zone, without feeling pressured.



8. Research Methodologies

Our groups talked about constructing research methodologies – pulling together the idea of a research question, ethics and scale. Our groups went out and tested out a mini research method/methodology using a pretend question

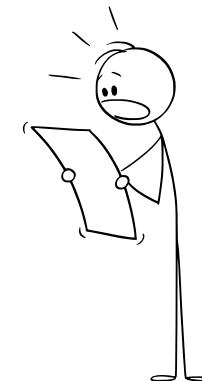
**This was the week
I felt like a
researcher for the
first time!!**

9. Data Analysis in Social Research

Our groups talked through the process of thematic analysis. Everyone practised at analysing pieces of text and feeding back themes.

There are different ways to cluster themes...action into consequences, how it affects people, animals and binary groupings

It was interesting how people interpreted and analysed the text differently—some did it alone, others together.

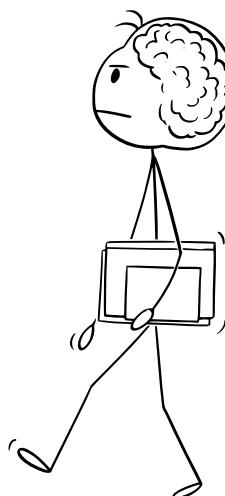


10. Designing your Research Question

Our groups talked through the process of designing a research question; and worked together to agree what question we would like to research.

I liked how, as a group, we were open to different possibilities—we discussed them and felt we should change them about 3-4 times. It was good to welcome and incorporate each other's ideas. I found it collaborative.

We used everything we learned in previous sessions to design a question that we felt we could research with the skills we have and the resources available



Session Plans and Materials

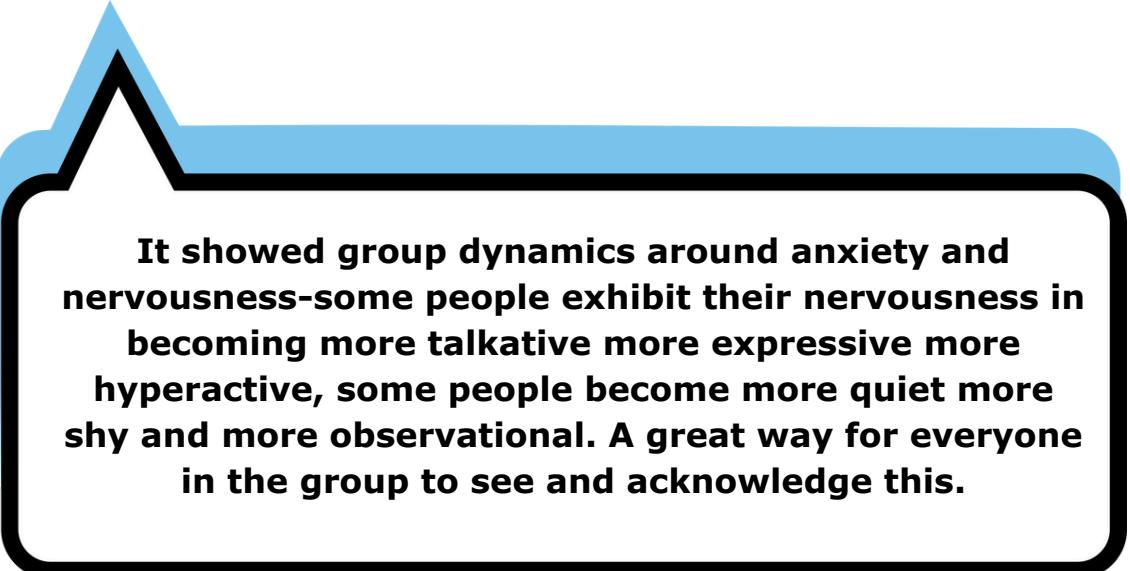
1. Group Agreement and Introduction Session

This session aims to introduce the group for the first time and provide an overview of the project's timeline, background, and scope. A key objective is for the group to work together to create a group agreement, while also allowing peers to ask questions and engage in discussion.

It is important to be open and honest by clearly informing peer researchers about the project's intentions, scope, and roles. Make sure everyone understands how their involvement will be used and its relevance to the overall project. Be transparent about any limitations, the project's funding, its duration, and the expected end date. This transparency fosters trust and supports informed consent. It is important to make everything as transparent as possible so people are clear on what to expect.

Some of our groups had socials to connect with immediately after the first session during peers' own time. People expressed they enjoyed having this more relaxed approach to get to know each other, but also it may have been better to have the social at the beginning of the session to ease into the space without any high expectations.

Asking about expectations gives a chance to promote the project and find out what people want.



It showed group dynamics around anxiety and nervousness-some people exhibit their nervousness in becoming more talkative more expressive more hyperactive, some people become more quiet more shy and more observational. A great way for everyone in the group to see and acknowledge this.

Respect

respect people's choice not to speak

Making space for everyone to have their say

Be aware of the room

Don't talk over each other

be self aware

Go back to a person if they are cut off/someone else speaks

Raise hand

respect anonymity

Safe Space

No expectation to share stories

confidential space

opt in /opt out

Trauma aware - be mindful of triggers

You can leave the room at anytime



Facilitators will check to see if you need support

Transparency

Know what's coming up

emails & texts

talk about upcoming content

Feedback to facilitators is welcomed!

Policies and underpinning docs will be shared

Accessibility

openness around accessibility needs

use Venues that are physically accessible

possible intoxication to be addressed by facilitators 121 with individuals, in a case by case way, to support medication /recovery/health needs

Don't bring recreational drugs or alcohol to the sessions

Support

2 facilitators in sessions: Alex & Signe

121s

2 facilitators in sessions

facilitators are group worker, and trained in psychological informed working (including trauma and ND training)

2. Introduction to Research

Why do we do research?

- 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?

Scale

- 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

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?

Quantitative, Qualitative and Desk Research

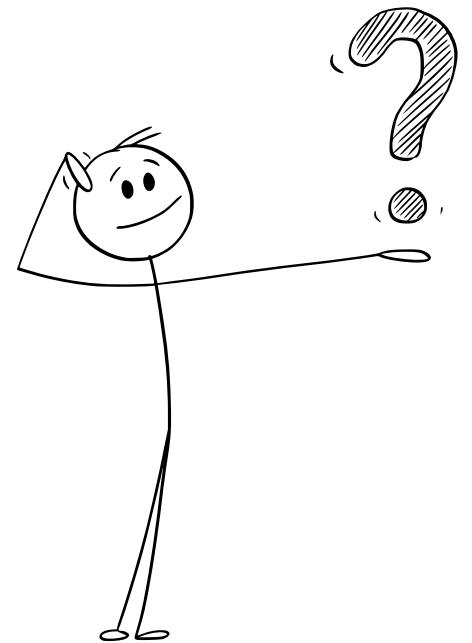
Quantitative data is **numbers-based**, countable, or measurable. Quantitative data tells us how many, how much, or how often in calculations.

Qualitative data is interpretation-based, **descriptive**, and relating to language. Qualitative data can help us to understand why, how, or what happened behind certain behaviours.

Desk research 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

Thinking About Your Research Topic

- **Consider Your Interests and ideas**
- **Draft a Research Question:** Based on your interests, think about what research question you'd like to ask and explore. It doesn't need to be perfect—just a starting point.
- **Reflect and Revise:** As we go through the sessions, you may gain new insights that lead you to change your question. Keep this question in mind, and be open to changing it or developing it as you learn more.
- **Return to This Later:** We'll come back to these questions in our final sessions to reflect on your research interests and ideas, and develop them further.



Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

3. Research Methods

Quantitative Research

- Methods
 - Surveys
 - Opinion polls
 - Counts
 - Freedom of Information (FOI)

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

Qualitative Research

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

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

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

Lego Serious Play

- Facilitation technique developed by Lego
- Can use other building materials
- Useful when asking someone to describe a state e.g. a future vision of what their life will be

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

Diary Keeping

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

Pick a question – pick a method

You are encouraged to adjust the example questions in this workbook to better suit the needs of your group.

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



Self Led task - Guiding Questions for Reflection

What do you want to research? What draws you to this idea?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

What aspects of research would you like to learn about?

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

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

4. Ethics

We found that it was useful to spend more than one session on this topic. Begin by thinking about what comes to mind when you hear the word "ethics" in the context of research, before going through the key concepts and questions in this section.

I think it helped us prepare for the research ahead

Ethical considerations

- Transparency: It is essential that research participants are informed of the intention, and how they fit into it, so that they are in a position to give informed consent.
- How much should a peer researcher share about their own story?
- Respect: The researcher must recognise the capacity and rights of all individuals to make their own choices, be treated with dignity and in a trauma informed way.
- Is this easier for peer researchers? Why?
- Responsibility: No matter your intentions, you're responsible for your impact.
- What happens if what you think is important deviates from what your research participants find important?

We learnt how to work through the process of peer research while keeping everybody involved safe and making sure that everybody understands their role and respects their boundaries and can withdraw consent at any time.

Ethical considerations

- Safety: The safety of research participants, as well as researchers and other staff, is of primary importance and takes precedence, and may require overriding other aspects of this policy. For example, if there is concern of threat to life or imminent serious harm, the appropriate support or emergency service should be contacted, even if this compromises confidentiality.
- What can be done to make sure you stay safe as a peer researcher? Are there any differences between insiders and outsiders in this?
- Beneficence: While negative consequences may occur, the researcher must make sure that the benefits are greater than the risks. The primary goal must be to improve the lives of participants, directly or indirectly, and protect their physical, mental and social well-being.
- How do you weigh up risks and benefits?

Group activity - Ethics

Think about the ethical principles discussed in different scenarios. Encourage group discussions to explore the ethical dilemmas and possible solutions.

Case Study 1: Community Views on Squirrels

Scenario: The Local Authority has commissioned research into community views on squirrels, with findings to inform a new policy. Despite several months of research, responses are limited and do not address the key issues. The Local Authority is eager to receive your findings. What ethical considerations should guide your next steps? Consider the importance of transparency and responsibility in reporting findings, even when data is limited.

Case Study 2: Social Media and Teenagers

Scenario: You are conducting a creative workshop with a group of teenagers to explore the role social media plays in their lives. What ethical considerations should you keep in mind throughout the research process? Think about the need for informed consent, risk assessment related to the emotional impact on participants, and ensuring support is available if sensitive topics arise.

Case Study 3: Interview with a Vulnerable Adult

Scenario: You are interviewing a vulnerable adult who has agreed to participate after building trust over time. During the interview, they disclose something unsettling. How should you respond ethically? Reflect on the importance of debriefing and ensuring support is available, as well as respecting the boundaries of both the participant and the researcher.

5. Insider/Outsider and Ethics in Peer Research

Insider/outsider

- Insider/outsider debates in research are about positionality – what position the researcher has in relation to the research topic and the participants that may take part in a study
- Insider researchers are part of the community that is being studied
- Outsiders are not. They are typically academics, journalists, working for think tanks or charities

Consider these two statements

- As an insider you may be more trusted and have better access to research participants.
- As an outsider you may be more trusted and have better access to research participants.
- Which is true? Why?

There are pros and cons - they matter

- Whether the researcher is an insider or outsider matters in research and can influence the research process and the data gathered.
- This is not wrong but should be considered when designing the research project.
- There are pros and cons to both approaches.

Pros and cons of peer research

- In peer research we're trying to make the most of the benefits that an insider perspective can bring.
- What are those benefits?
- What are the potential drawbacks to consider?

Some outsider advantages

- Free of commitment to the group
- Advantage in observation and analysis of events and structures (objective observer)
- Can see properties lost to the insider because of familiarisation, and discover something of value to theory and/or to research participants
- May be trusted with sensitive information that would not be shared with an insider

Some insider disadvantages

- Not seen as researchers but advocates by some
- May be biased towards interpretations or findings
- Experiencing role conflicts
- May find research activities bring about difficult memories or become triggering

Some insider advantages

- Not seen as 'strangers' but members of the group
- Incorporate traditionally ignored perspectives into theory
- Know the culture, language (jargon), familiarity with local conditions
- Less inclined to construct stereotypes
- Easier to gain acceptance, trust and cooperation

Some outsider disadvantages

- May experience 'culture shock', which can delay or interfere with research
- May overlook or misinterpret important cultural cues or details
- Can take time to establish trust; it may never happen
- May receive 'expected results' rather than true attitudes or knowledge
- More time required understanding the culture and language (jargon)

Being both insider and outsider

- Insiders are part of the community that is being studied
- This can be a broad category (for example TA) that intersects with other identities
- What does it mean to be both an insider and an outsider as a researcher?

Group activity - insider/outsider

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.

Self-Led Task: Understanding the Insider-Outerider Role in Research

The following resources help explain what it means to be either an insider or outsider when doing research.

Option 1:

Short Article and Audio

Read and/or listen to a short article explaining the difference between being an insider or outsider. It also looks at some pros and cons of both roles.

Article: Guest Blog – The insider debate in qualitative research – should there be one? (DEMENTIA RESEARCHER, nihr.ac.uk)

Option 2:

Reflective Academic Paper

Read a more detailed paper where the writers talk about their own experiences as insiders and outsiders in research.

This option is more in-depth and academic.

Paper: The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outerider in Qualitative Research - Sonya Corbin Dwyer & Jennifer L. Buckle, 2009 (sagepub.com)

6. Intersectionality as a Frame of Reference

Self Led Task: Understanding Intersectionality

This optional self-led task will help you to understand the concept of intersectionality by exploring how different aspects of identity (such as race, gender, class, and sexuality) intersect and impact people's experiences of privilege and oppression.

Watch the Video:

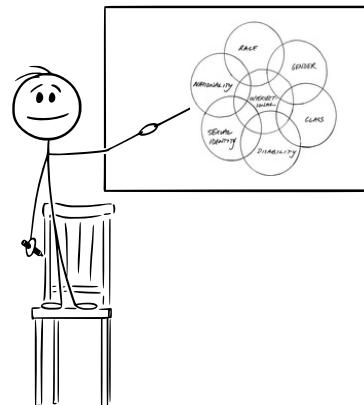
If you have access to the internet, you can watch the following YouTube video to get a short introduction to intersectionality:

What is Intersectionality? - YouTube Video (Duration: 1min:54 sec)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHc>

Read the Article (Alternative to Video):

If you do not have internet access or prefer reading, you can read the following Time magazine article which provides an overview of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality:

“What is Intersectionality?” - Time Magazine



Asking what we understand intersectionality to be and what it means to us would have been beneficial. Many of us have experiences with intersectionality

Intersectionality

WHAT IT IS WHY IT MATTERS

Just a new word for diversity?

Diversity is an acknowledgement that each of us have different backgrounds, personality, life experiences and beliefs. It is a combination of individual differences that shape our collective view of the world, our perspective and our approach.

If **Diversity** is the range of circles...

Intersectionality is about the overlap, rather than the circles themselves.

A **map** to understand ways in which different parts of the self interrelate.

It can also be used as a **tool** to illustrate the variety of human experiences, and how **privilege, oppression** and **power** can affect us differently

What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a way of understanding how parts of a person's identity cross over, combine or "intersect" to create different, specific and unique experiences of life.

First used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.



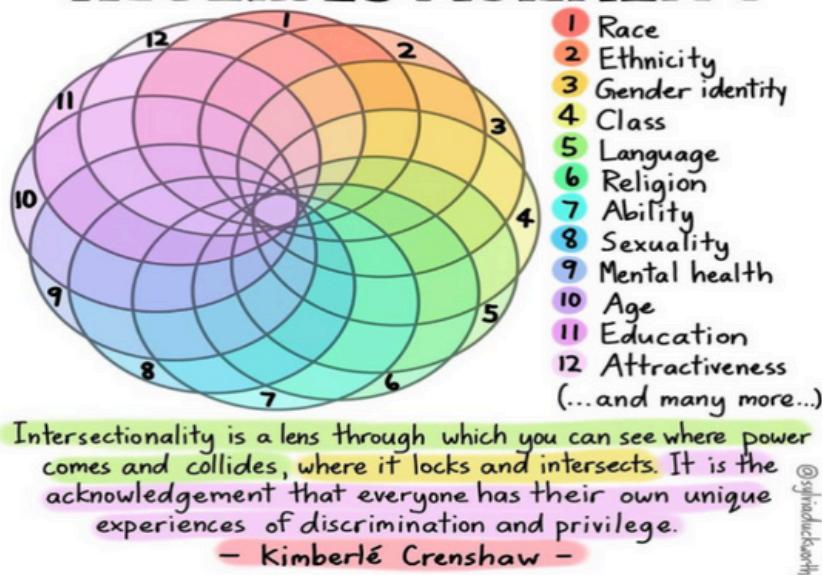
Protected Characteristics

The Equality Act became UK law in 2010 and this protects people from discrimination. Under the Equality Act, there are currently nine "Protected Characteristics"

- Disability
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity

Many workplaces, schools, charities have an "EDI policy"

INTERSECTIONALITY



Why might it be important to consider intersectionality when designing and carrying out research?

Power, privilege and oppression

Power is understood in different ways by different people. One definition is it is our ability to create or resist change.

Whether we are empowered or disempowered may be affected by the context we are in, and whether we experience privilege or oppression in that context.

“**Privilege**” is a set of unearned **benefits** experienced by people who fit into a specific social group.

Oppression is a set of unearned **disadvantage** experienced by people who fit into a specific social group.

Most people will experience a mix of privilege and oppression in their lives, however some people will be more likely to experience more of one than the other due to societies systems, which are designed with a one size fits all approach. This is sometimes referred to as **systemic injustice**.

Power

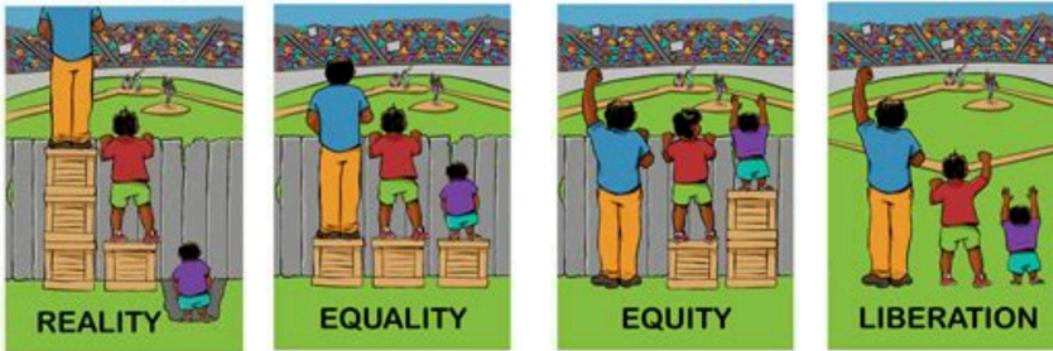


Intersectionality

Equity



Equity



intersectionality and diversity:

How would you create a research project that creates equity and addresses power, privilege and

1. Are purple people more likely to become homeless than orange people? Why?
2. How can services be improved for people in TA?
3. Do people feel listened to in TA?
4. What does the local service provision look like for residents of Rainbow House?

Group Activity - Intentionality

As a group activity, you could create your own definition of intersectionality based on the discussed characteristics including those relevant to your project.

For example, one of our groups defined Intersectionality as the overlap of different identity characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, disability, etc. For this research, we also include the experience of homelessness as an identity characteristic.

Self-led Task - Intersectionality

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

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

In what ways do you think research might disempower?

7. Personal Skills in Research

Paired Storytelling Activity

Engage in storytelling and reflective listening to uncover and recognise personal skills and assets within your peer research group.

- Pair up (or form trios if necessary).
- Assign roles within each pair: one person will be the storyteller and the other the listener.
- The storyteller shares a personal story highlighting their skills, achievements, or meaningful experiences.
- The listener practices active listening, noting skills, strengths, and positive qualities demonstrated in the story.
- Switch roles, giving the previous listener a chance to tell their story while the previous storyteller listens.
- The listener provides feedback to the storyteller, articulating the skills, strengths, and personal qualities they perceived.
- Discuss how receiving feedback can boost confidence and self-awareness.

Group Discussion

- As a group, discuss what skills or strengths you discovered with your partner and how it felt to receive feedback on your own story.
- Capture key themes and strengths of your peer research as identified through the activity and discuss how these can be applied to peer research.
- Reflect on how the story telling activity can develop listening and interpretation skills which are key research skills

Exploring Research Methods

- Introduce a hat with slips containing various research methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups).
- Ask a volunteer to pull a method out of the hat, and as a group discuss which research methods align with people's identified strengths and roles.

8. Research Methodologies

Choosing research methods and constructing methodologies

Choosing your research method(s)

- Remember your question - choose the method(s) that best answers it
- Remember your personal skills (and the skills of others you may be able to draw on)
- Consider the scope of the project
- Consider your limitations
- Consider theoretical approach
- Remember ethics
- The validity of your study is anchored in these

Methods in social research

- Desk research
- Observation
- Semi- structured interview
- Survey
- Count
- Focus Group
- Case Study
- Opinion poll
- Fieldwork
- Rivers of life
- Mapping
- Freedom of Information request (FOI)

Constructing a methodology

- In going through these consideration, you are constructing a methodology, explaining what you are going to do, and why you have made these choices
- A research methodology is both the collection of methods you apply to your research, as well as the "principles, theories, and values" that support your research approach
- What does this mean...?

Summarising methods v methodology

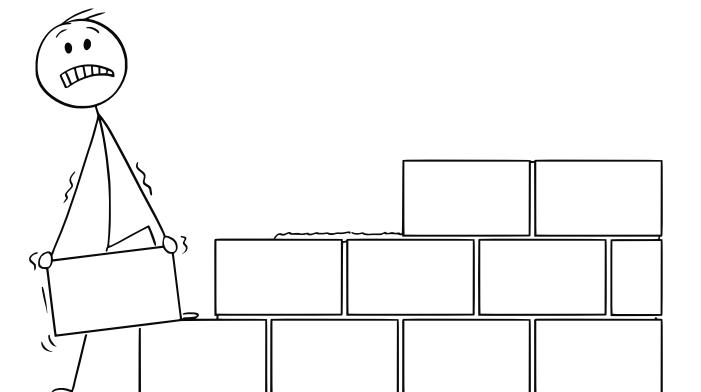
- Methods cover the technical procedures or steps taken to do the research (your tools)
- Methodology provides the underlying reasons why certain methods are used in the process (your approach and why this is chosen)

Types of methodological approaches

- Quantitative: Things you can count. You need a certain sample size for this to be meaningful. Focuses on quantifying data and generalising results
- Qualitative: Narrative. Aims to provide a detailed description and interpretation of feelings and opinions. A smaller sample size will do
- Mixed: Combines quantitative and qualitative approaches and can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Also sometimes called triangulation

What would you do...

- Your local authority wants to find out how primary school children feel about free school meals in an attempt to improve their image. There is a decent budget. You are keen to do it but it is a competitive bidding process.
- 'Friends of Queens Park' is worried the users of the park are trashing the environment and are keen to find out what they can do to change park visitors' behaviour. They have asked you for help. They only have a small budget but no deadline
- The government wants you to help them find out how many secondary school children cycle to school, and why some don't. They are interested in whether specific groups of children are more likely to cycle and why. You have a decent budget and time
- A charity has hired you to investigate whether vaping can help long time smokers give up cigarettes for more than a year. They can provide support in terms of manpower as well as funding. Deadline has not been discussed.



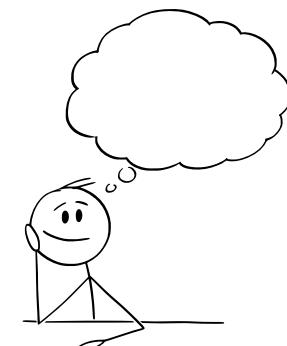
Self Led - Research questions for testing out research methodology self-led task

The purpose of this task is to offer the time and space to experiment with research methodologies and methods in a safe environment, before moving on to your chosen topic. Each peer chooses a question, and decides on one or more research methods to answer the questions, which are then explored in practice. The questions are intentionally simple to focus on the process of research.

This activity aims to help you develop a sense of what's involved in preparing and conducting research. By working on these manageable topics, you can build confidence and gain practical experience that will be valuable for more complex research projects in the future.

We used the questions below, which lend themselves to a range of different research methods. Do feel free to modify or change these to better suit the needs and interests of the group.

1. What is the dessert most commonly given with school dinners in English primary schools?
2. How many people do you know who prefer apples over pears? Why?
3. How often are seagulls successful in stealing food from people on a beach in any given hour? Do they go for particular food items?
4. Which are the preferred places to get ice cream for people you know, and how do they get there? Why?
5. How many cafes are there in a given location?
6. How do people you know feel about cooking?
7. How often do people you know eat something sugary during the day? When?
8. What does the perfect cafe look like to people you know?



9. Data Analysis in Social Research

What is it

- Data analysis in sociological research refers to the collection and analysis of data, whereby findings from the data are interpreted and summarised
- It involves the interpretation of data gathered through the use of analytical and logical reasoning to determine patterns, relationships, or trends

Steps in Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2013)

Thematic analysis is an iterative process involving these steps

- familiarization of data
- generation of codes
- combining codes into themes
- reviewing themes
- determine significance of themes
- reporting of findings

Thematic Analysis

- Is a multistage analytic method that involves coding qualitative datasets and using those codes to label and group similar types of data. This makes generating themes and analysing the data more manageable

Coding your data

- A code is a label that describes your content in a way that makes it easy to compare and contrast
- For example in this sentence: “The seagull stole my sandwich” you can have a code for ‘seagull’ and a code for ‘sandwich’. Or the whole sentence could be coded ‘experiences on the beach’
- If you do this manually, you assign a colour to each code, and then go through all your data, highlighting in your chosen colour every time the code appears

Coding your data, continued...

- You can use deductive codes (pre-established), or inductive codes (emerging from the data)
- As thematic analysis is an iterative process, you can go back and forth between both. This is called hybrid coding
- Coding ensures that you go through your data in a systematic way that other researchers can reproduce rather than making up themes from a hunch or feeling

Reviewing Themes and Determining Significance

- You now have themes that have emerged from your data. On your flip chart, you can start to organise them and identify how they relate to each other
- You can then check how often different themes appear in your data (you may find a particular code colour dominates!)
- You can cross reference this against your demographic data. Do certain themes only appear with certain demographics? Or certain codes (even more specific)?

Clustering into Themes

- Generating themes means sorting, or clustering, the codes into higher-level topics. Different codes that have something in common get clustered together. You can do this physically on a flip chart with post-it notes so you can move everything around as you discuss
- In the case of the thieving seagulls, this could be 'lunch' or 'bad experiences on the beach'
- This is how you begin to develop themes

Reporting your findings

- Briefly explain what you set out to do and how you did it before revealing what you found
- Always good to add direct quotes and images (for example a river of life drawing) to illustrate your findings, if you have consent to do so anonymously
- If your dataset is big enough, you may want to calculate percentages (50% said so and so...)
- Consider your audience
- Finish with a clear message for people to take home. This could be recommendations
- Remember to thank participants for their time
- Referencing other work can be a good way of building on the work of others while adding clarity to yours

Practical Activity: Thematic Analysis of Social Attitudes towards Seagulls

Conduct a thematic analysis on the case study data provided, which explores social attitudes towards seagulls. The aim is to identify common themes, contrasting views, and underlying perceptions of seagulls in urban coastal environments.

Steps for Thematic Analysis:

1. Familiarisation with data: Read and re-read the case studies provided to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' views.
2. Initial coding: Identify key words or phrases that represent the main points made by the participants.
3. Identifying themes: Group the codes into broader themes related to the participants' views on seagulls.
4. Reviewing themes: Ensure that the themes accurately reflect the views expressed in the data, adjusting or combining them where necessary.
5. Defining and naming themes: Clearly define what each theme represents and provide a name that succinctly captures the essence of the grouped codes.
6. Group Activity: Collaborate with your team to discuss and refine the identified themes. Share your interpretations and come to a consensus on the final themes and their definitions.

Note: These are not real case studies! The data provided has been created for the purpose of this activity.

Participant details

Age: 55

Gender: Female

Location: Brighton

"Seagulls, for me, evoke a mixed range of emotions and attitudes. On one hand, they are a part of the coastal landscape and contribute to the overall ambience of places like Brighton Beach. Their presence adds to the charm and authenticity of the coastal experience, and I appreciate the sight and sounds of these birds soaring gracefully overhead. At least at a distance.

Up closer, I am not so keen on their behaviour and interactions with humans. While I understand that seagulls are opportunistic feeders and have adapted to urban environments, their scavenging can be problematic, especially in areas with lots of people.

Seagulls can be really bold and assertive, particularly when it comes to food scavenging. Their swooping and squawking can be annoying at night, and they can be intimidating for young children or individuals with food in public. I've witnessed seagulls snatch food directly from people's hands or picnic baskets, which is not nice if you're trying to have an ice cream on the beach.

Additionally, seagull droppings can create hygiene concerns and they spread rubbish around from scavenging through bins. This aspect of their behaviour can contribute to negative perceptions and attitudes towards seagulls, especially among those who view them primarily as nuisance animals.

Despite these challenges, I recognise that seagulls are part of the natural ecosystem and have adapted to coexist with humans in coastal areas. I believe it's important to strike a balance between appreciating their presence as part of the coastal environment while also implementing measures to mitigate negative interactions and address concerns related to hygiene and safety.

Participant details

Age: 40

Gender: Male

Location: Brighton

"I really don't like seagulls. I don't understand why they are a protected species, they are a nuisance! Have you ever seen one up close? They are really big and they are just not afraid of you. It's like they know they're protected. They're also just really aggressive. I've seen one attack a cat, and the seagull won the fight!

I have two young children, and buying them an ice cream on the beach is perilous. Both my children have been attacked more than once. They come from behind so you don't see them, and WHAM, just like that your child is left empty handed. Once, my son was left bleeding because it bit his finger. I didn't know what to do! They're filthy scavengers, surely this was unsafe? It's not exactly a relaxing way to spend time on the beach.

It's the same in the parks or anywhere else. Particularly where there are lots of children, they are easy targets. You basically can't feed your children in public in Brighton. My oldest is in primary school, and the seagulls gather at pick-up time. They're clever bastards, they know when there's a good chance of a meal.

Why are they not considered a public nuisance? I think they are pests. There are so many, I don't believe they are endangered. Look at all the cars parked around Brighton - they're full of bird poo. They go through the rubbish bins, spreading all the filth all over the streets. And the council does nothing!

I think they should be culled, get them down to a more manageable population size. At the moment it feels like they're winning, we're not in control."

10. Designing Your Research Question

Figure 1 - Writing strong research questions



Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

¹¹ Scribbr (2023) Writing strong research questions. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-questions/>

The WHY

Why do you want to carry out this research project?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

How will this research project benefit the participant?

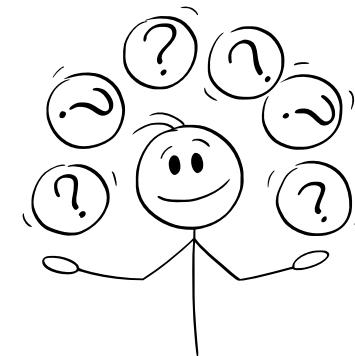
What is your motivation for it?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

The WHAT

What are the research question(s)?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections



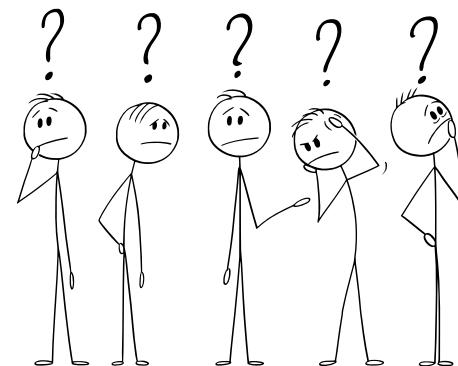
Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

**What method would work best to address the question?
Will the research involve deception of any sort?**

The WHO

Who are the best people to invite to take part in this research?
How many participants are you thinking of recruiting?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections



Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

Is there anyone who cannot take part? (Inclusion & exclusion criteria)

The HOW and the WHERE

Where will you find them?
How will you advertise the project?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

How will you obtain the consent of participants?

Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to protect their interests?

How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

The RISK and its MANAGEMENT

Will there be any possible psychological or physical discomfort/distress that **participants** and **researchers** may experience during or after the research?

What safety plans and support will you put in place to minimise these risks?



	Risks	Safety plans/Support?
Participants		
Researchers		

The CONFIDENTIALITY

How will participant confidentiality be maintained?
How will data be anonymised to ensure participants' confidentiality?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections



Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

How will personal data and study results be stored securely during and after the study?
Who will have access to participants' data?

The MONEY

How is this research funded?

Feel free to use this space to jot down your perspectives, ideas, and reflections

How much will you pay participants for their time? How will they get the payment (e.g., voucher)?	How much will the researchers be paid for their time?	What are other costs needed for this research to be completed?

PART 3: Our Stories

In this section of the manual, the peer researchers share their personal experiences from their peer research journey. The reflections have been compiled by 19 individuals across four peer research groups:

Justlife

- Group 1 (Pilot)

We authored the original manual and have continued our research, sharing additional learning.

- Group 2

We were set up as an additional group to test out and feedback on the manual.

RISE

We are a women-only team with shared experience of domestic abuse who have tested and helped to refine the manual and contributed new ideas.

Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice, University of Southampton

We are a peer research group established by the Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice to test and refine the manual.

The reflections from all four groups have been incorporated into the final manual, which builds on the pilot manual on 'how to set up a peer research group', co-created by the first group run by Justlife.

We are grateful for the time and care everyone has taken to make this as successful and accessible as possible. While there were many overlaps, a few points were more important to some groups than others. The following section has reflections from each of the groups in their own words.

We hope that this resource will inspire you to see what might work well for you, should you wish to do this yourself.



Justlife - Group 1 (Pilot)

When we first met we were all strangers in a brand new environment. We didn't have a common understanding of how the space should function, so we prioritised safety and comfort in the initial stages of the project.

The first session was dedicated to introducing ourselves to each other, discussing individual support needs/accommodations, informing how the group would function and also how we would handle issues within and outside the group. We created a group agreement, which we displayed on a large piece of paper with sticky notes, so it could be revised as the group felt necessary.

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

It was a cooperative space rather than a competitive one - this is really rare.

During the initial stage, we decided to document our processes and create something to aid others in setting up a peer research group.

Helped by our facilitators, we produced a manual on how to set up a peer research Group in a safe way. Below are some highlights.

Accessibility

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. 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.

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

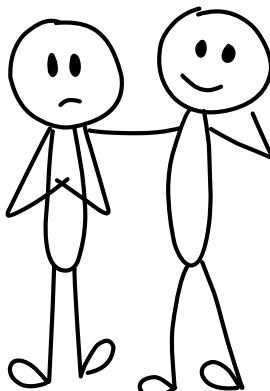
Accessibility is very important - physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, psychological safety.

Support

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.

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 (...) It allowed us to gradually ease into talking about homelessness when the group were comfortable with each other and the concepts of research.

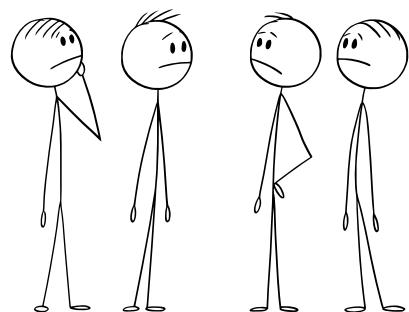


Knowledge Exchange

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.

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 [temporary accommodation] has been enriching and informative.



Payment

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 and contributes to the sense that peer researchers and facilitators are valued equally. It was great to have options - cash, bank transfers or vouchers.

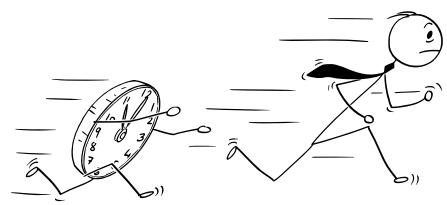
This is about trust. We were paid for self-reflection time without having to prove what we've done. It was all done on trust.

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

Being Wise with Time

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.



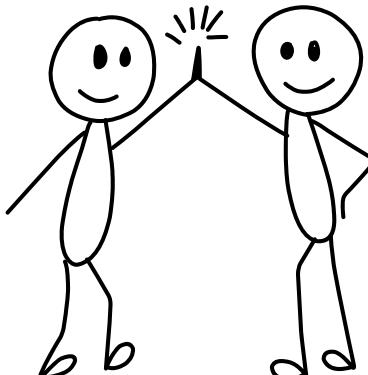
We had a focus: working towards the timeline which was set by our funding. Openness about this from a start helped

Two-Person Facilitation

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.

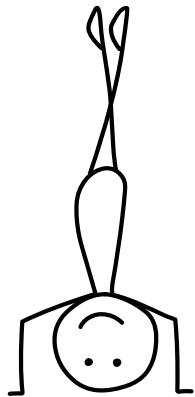
There was a non-patronising approach to facilitation - we felt like equals.

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.



Joy and Fun

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.



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).

Impact

“For a group like us with low expectations, it has been a remarkable success already. The experiences and skills gained have been enough to change each member of the group. It’s been a worthwhile year already. This project is a means of empowering and supporting a group of peers, while also benefiting their wider community. We’re positive that even the most disadvantaged people in a community can affect positive change on themselves and their surroundings with the right resources and support. And we’re not finished yet!”

Justlife - Group 2

Our group was established in February 2024 to test the manual created by the pilot peer research group. We were trained on the same topics and are now about to start conducting our own research.

Our peer research group consists of four members, each with lived experience of being homeless in temporary accommodation (TA). But that's pretty much where the similarities end. We are a diverse group of people with very different backgrounds, but when we're all in the room together we're peer researchers and we're all equally valued. We have gotten to know enough about each other to know what strengths each of us has and how they can be used to keep everyone happy and safe.

We are supported by two facilitators who have been instrumental in teaching us essential research skills, including methods, methodology, and ethics. These skills—such as data collection and analysis—are directly applied to our project and will likely benefit us in future endeavours.

By focusing on lived experiences, we are committed to ensuring that our research accurately reflects the challenges faced by TA residents. This approach will help inform better service design, tailored to meet the diverse needs of this population. We hope these insights will contribute to improving the housing and homelessness system.

Here we reflect on some of the key themes we feel have been important to our success so far:

Group Dynamics

We developed a strong sense of trust, respect, and teamwork, which made it easier for us to focus on our goals and share ideas freely. The small size of our group was a plus, as it was easy to manage and fostered a collaborative atmosphere.

We do not push our personal beliefs on others and are mindful of others in terms of what we bring to the group. Everyone can learn from each other. Working as a group is more powerful and means we can share our skills.

The working group agreement helps us work collaboratively.

Intersectionality

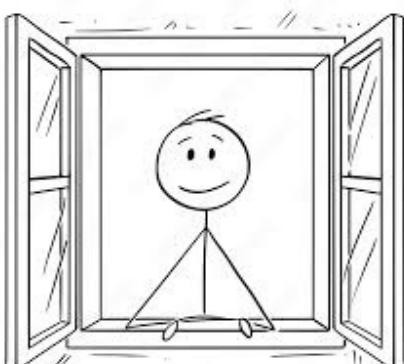
We learned that research can be influenced by different identities and experiences, which made us more aware of the importance of accommodating diverse needs. We recognised that it's crucial to provide the right support to each person, focusing on equity rather than treating everyone the same.

Learning that there is so much more to research than I originally realised and how what you're researching can be different for different intersectionalities.

Transparency

The role description helped me explain peer research to others.

We appreciated clear communication and knowing what to expect from each session, especially with advance emails that helped us prepare. Detailed role descriptions were also useful, giving us a better understanding of our responsibilities within the group.



Adelle Stowk | 123RF Stock Photo

I like knowing what the session will be about—having emails beforehand to prepare the mind. If there is a two-week gap, it refreshes the brain.

Flexibility and Adaptability

The flexibility to attend sessions as needed and the option to have one-on-one catch-up sessions were important to us. We also liked how the facilitators balanced teaching with discussions, adapting the sessions to keep things moving smoothly and at a pace that suited everyone.

1:1 sessions are helpful for catching up on work and check-in. Can make learning easier than group work.

Remote working gives flexibility—though it's not for everyone.

It's not about making things the same for everyone; extra preparation might be needed for one person to make it fair for everyone. It has to do with equity rather than equality.

Support and Safety

Creating a safe and comfortable environment was important to us. We used trigger warnings, break-out spaces, and regular check-ins to ensure everyone felt okay during sessions. We also thought that starting with a social event before formal agreements would help build a stronger sense of community.

Making sure you are comfortable with what you are learning.

Check-ins and check-outs are essential and work well

Mental Health and Well-being

Being part of the group was a welcome break from daily life, helping us to focus and engage our minds. We prioritised our mental and physical well-being, ensuring that these needs were met before anything else.

Being part of the peer research group is a helpful distraction from everyday life and gets my brain ticking.

Psychological and physical well-being comes first.

Personal Growth and Resilience

Through our experiences in the group, we grew personally and became more resilient. The challenges and learning opportunities provided by the group were key to our development, helping us to evolve as individuals.

I feel professional

I'm excited to put what i've learnt into practice, i'm grateful that i've been given this opportunity to learn new skills that I can take forward and build on in the future.

Impact

“Being part of this peer research group has been a transformative experience. I’ve come to understand that research is much more than simply gathering data; it involves deep thought and careful design to ensure questions are fair and insights are rich. Initially, I doubted whether I would have much to contribute, but the support from our facilitators and training materials has been invaluable. Together, we are confident in our ability to complete this research successfully.

Attending a knowledge exchange event further broadened my perspective, as I observed how other services use peer research. This experience has inspired me to consider a future role in peer mentoring.”

RISE

Who We Are

We are a woman-only group of four peer researchers, and all of us have lived experience of domestic abuse. The experience of homeless and temporary accommodation is common for many women who experience domestic abuse. Even when women do not 'leave' (to take up emergency accommodation) it can be argued that the experience of abuse and isolation can make them feel homeless in their own homes and communities.

We are a diverse team in terms of education, age, sexuality, gender identity (including non-binary), disability, neurodiversity and ethnicity. All members have previous experience either as a Community Researcher volunteer at RISE or as a paid Change Maker linked to the Community Rising Project (Community Fund, 2021-24).

In addition to the manual, our facilitators were guided by the The RISE Walk Together Programme, based on a research approach that was created with and for women with lived experience of domestic abuse.

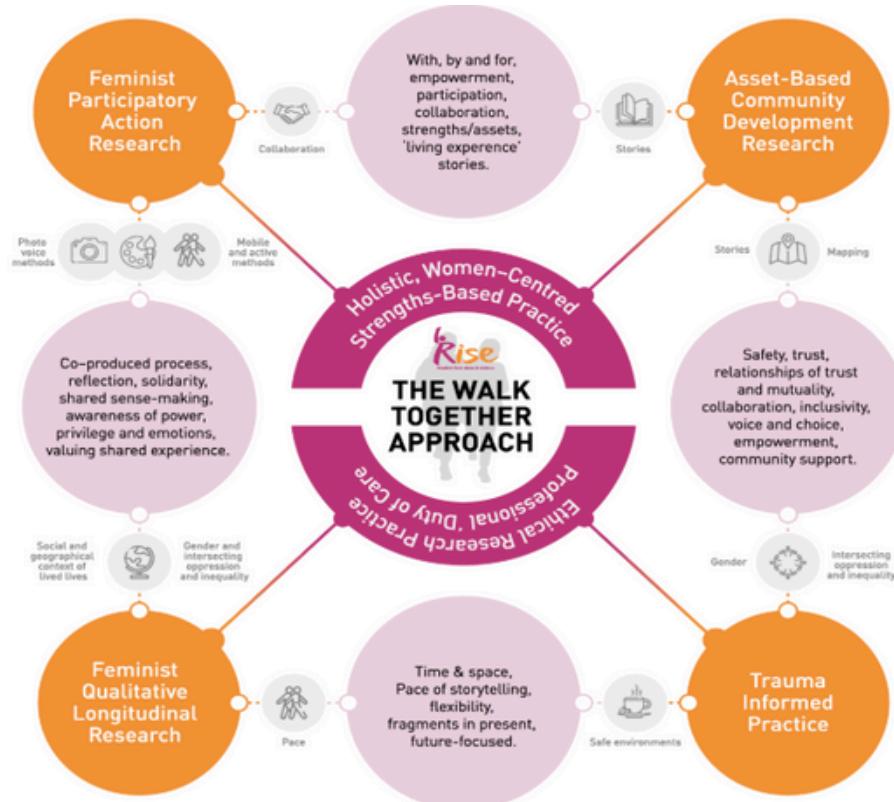


Image 1: The RISE Walk Together research approach, created with and for women who have experienced domestic abuse.

What We Did

As late starters to the project, we condensed two modules into each weekly session. We fed back to Justlife each week, what we thought worked well and what could be improved. We then created a presentation to present to the wider team at the Knowledge Exchange Event, highlighting what we had learnt and key things that mattered to us. Below is a condensed version.

Our Perspective

Our lived experiences have shaped how we work together as a research team and conduct research in the community. As a woman-only team, with the specific experience and needs of researchers and 'participants' who have experienced domestic abuse, it was essential to create trauma-informed research practice and environments.

What We Learnt

It's important to understand the experience of domestic abuse, and specifically coercive control, and the impact that this can have on peer researchers and 'participants'.

Domestic abuse, especially coercive control can take away your sense of freedom, it means you are 'isolated and trapped'. 'It can 'shrink your world' – you have no space. This can feel 'unexplainable to people who don't know'.

As a 'woman - only team', what makes us feel supported is an understanding of domestic abuse, shared values and opportunities to feel free, heard and respected, and an organisation (RISE) and collaboration (Justlife) that reflects this.

Our lived experience of domestic abuse and intersecting oppression make us acutely aware of the power-imbalances that can occur in research settings and relationships, and the need for clear and safe ethical guidelines that address trauma informed support. The module on intersectionality felt crucial to understand different experiences of minority communities, but we wanted the right kind of language to feel inclusive and safe. We felt differently about terms like 'survivor' and 'victim' and felt the use of a glossary, in the words of the peer researchers, would help.

We created safe, comfortable and empowering research environments in our team, and mirrored these when working with research 'participants'. We felt strongly that advice about walking at someone's pace rather than 'digging deep' should be built into the manual, allowing for the fact that stories are rarely linear or safe to tell in one sitting or space.

We were struck by our unusually subdued mood after taking part in a group activity, outlined in the manual, where we were asked to list our skills and share them in the group. By introducing an Asset Based Development exercise, where instead we were invited to share stories about an activity or project we were proud of, and for a listener to reflect back on skills, gifts and passions (strengths of head, heart and hands), we felt lifted and energised. We talked about how hard it is for women to talk about their skills and how this can feel doubly hard for women who have experienced domestic abuse.

Stories are personal and help you express yourself. It feels like you are being listened to and heard. It's also like a mini exercise on how to be a researcher



Image 2: Our Collective Strengths

Using real examples can make people feel a pressure to get it right. The hypothetical research questions and activities in the manual got us talking about this pressure within our own training, and how the more hypothetical examples (squirrels and seagulls!), could make sessions feel more inclusive and safe. (peer research Facilitator)

We Are a Community

Joining together as a network of peer researchers is deeply valuable and we welcome future opportunities to grow and strengthen our work. The development of a peer research ethics committee felt like an exciting direction for future work.

As survivors, peer research has been essential to finding a community as domestic abuse isolates you. No perpetrator wants you to have a community of survivors around you.

Being a Peer-Researcher makes us feel proud of ourselves and feel proud of the group. It offers reintegration into society and the opportunity to use lived experience and turn it from something really negative to something valuable

These two poems express how we felt on our research journey, and in the space that was made possible by the Justlife project.

Poem 1

When someone deeply listens to you

It's like the curtains in a dark room are gently peeled open, and beams of sunlight and warmth fill the once-buried and cold space

When the sun's rays bounce off each wall, you are heard and held

When the window opens and a fresh breeze breathes life into the room, you are healing.

When someone deeply listens to you

You are swimming freely in an ocean

In a depth of breathtaking beauty

That nurtures and soothes you

Untangling your pain and rippling out

Connecting you on a boundless journey of peace that becomes you, a force of nature you were always destined to be.

Poem 2

When someone deeply listens to me

I am seen

I am whole

I am valued

Not silenced

Not gagged

Not bound

I am free

To be.

We aren't just 'peers' we are 'community researchers', our lived experience enables us to create 'bridges of understanding' with each other, and to reach the voices and experiences of a wider community of women who are rarely heard in traditional research.

Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice, University of Southampton

Who We Are

Our group at the Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice, University of Southampton used the peer research manual to form a peer research team, made up of six individuals with lived experience of homelessness. Our goal was to train five peer mentors to become peer researchers, using the manual as a guide to ensure the process was carried out safely and effectively over six weeks.

In the initial sessions, we introduced the project and explored the fundamentals of research, covering various methods, designs, creative approaches, and brainstorming research question ideas. We felt it was important to start discussing potential research questions early in the process.

A key focus for us was research ethics, which we supported with an ethics worksheet designed by the facilitators. In one session, we concentrated on the personal skills module, discussing the difference between soft and hard skills, using content from the manual to guide our discussion.

The venue we used was accessible, well-located, and free, but we learned that being clear about timetables, including break times, was crucial to the group's overall experience.

We also felt there should be a facilitator's version of the manual, distinct from the one used by peer researchers. This could focus on lesson plans and help improve the structure and accessibility of the process, making it easier to follow.

A key focus for us was maintaining a balance between facilitating and offering support throughout the process.

Here are our reflections on how we found our experience during the peer research journey.

"A lovely network service"

"Worked well as a team"

"Learned a lot, discuss different ideas, hear people's different experiences and opinions"

"Thought provoking especially about ethical methods used and we talked about this in depth"

How have you found the research group?

"I enjoyed it, some parts found challenging, like having a room full of individuals who have different views and opinions and had to remain open minded about the differences"

"Opened my eyes to different ways of doing peer research within ethical acceptability"

"Felt a bit confused about what the actual main goal was, what the final topic was"

What was missing (if there was any)? What could be done better?

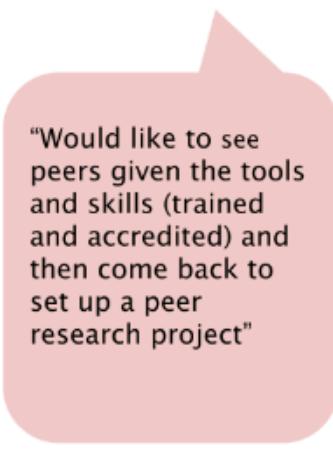
"I would like to see peers learn all the parts and then come back and challenge the book (or how would you set up a research group now, would you do the same, what would you change), so have the basic understanding of research before being asked to set one up"

"more clarity on research question/topic"

What would you like to do next?



"Would be interested in doing peer research in the future"



"Would like to see peers given the tools and skills (trained and accredited) and then come back to set up a peer research project"



"Would like to see peer research programmes accredited/as a qualification where peers can progress professionally in research"

Glossary

This glossary was co-created by four peer research groups that contributed to this manual during a 'Knowledge Exchange Event'. It defines key terms to reflect our shared understanding, perspectives, and ideas.

Words matter.

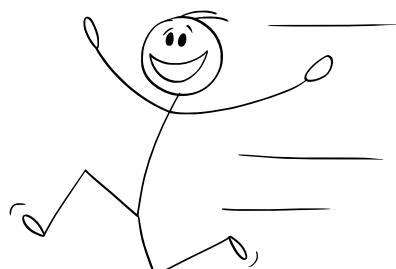
Language matters.

Understanding matters.

The glossary also draws on the wider research and lived experience work carried out by Justlife. We hope it will help clarify ideas and language used throughout the manual.

Accessibility:	<p>The extent to which different people can engage with something. This involves removing physical, digital, sensory, psychological, and logistical barriers that may prevent full participation. This can be done both proactively and in response to specific individual needs.</p>
Co-production:	<p>Co-production involves significant participation from all individuals at every stage of the project. This approach ensures that participants work together from beginning to end, with the shared goal of achieving a common outcome. Each person has an equal role and input throughout the process, with minimal or no hierarchy, depending on the project's nature and the organisation or group facilitating it.</p>
Co-design:	<p>Co-design is a process of brainstorming together, where people bring their experiences, backgrounds, positions, and journeys in order to contribute to a specific goal. This collaborative approach ensures that all voices are included as the group works towards a tangible outcome.</p>

Co-create:	<p>Co-creation is a collaborative process where a diverse group of individuals comes together to make something, sharing their skills, knowledge, and experiences. An example of co-creation is peer research, where individuals with shared experiences or backgrounds work collaboratively. While peer researchers may be working towards a pre-defined goal, the process is not always fully open at every stage. It encompasses the broader idea of collaborative creation through the exchange of skills and experience. Peer research will often include elements of training in necessary skills by an experienced facilitator.</p>
All three approaches fall under the same umbrella of collaboration , as they involve different ways of working together to achieve shared goals.	
Disability:	<p>Disability is an umbrella term that can be applied to a range of different experiences, such as physical and sensory impairments, mental health conditions, learning differences and long-term or chronic illnesses. Disabilities can be physical or hidden, often overlapping and experienced differently by each and every person. A disability can be present from birth or occur later on in a person's life and also can be temporary. Disability is often the result of different barriers that hinder a person's full participation.</p>
Emergency Accommodation (EA):	<p>EA is where people experiencing homelessness are placed by the council while they decide whether that individual or family is owed a main housing duty (a legal responsibility of the local authority to provide accommodation until permanent housing is found). EA is primarily used as a stopgap while people wait for longer-term residence in temporary accommodation (TA), and therefore usually precedes a TA placement.</p>



Homelessness:	<p>A preventable and complex issue marked by inadequate access to stable housing which leads to insecurity and vulnerability. It is not just rough sleeping; it includes 'hidden homelessness,' where individuals live in temporary or inadequate conditions, such as hostels, shelters, overcrowded spaces, vehicles, or sofa surfing. Often accompanied by stigma and taboo, homelessness can affect anyone. It may involve significant physical and mental health issues, as well as inadequate access to essential services. It may also be as simple as short-term financial issues or relationship breakdowns that lead to compounding problems.</p>
Intersectionality:	<p>Intersectionality refers to the crossover or intersection of all identities and experiences, which shape how life is uniquely experienced, rather than simply compiling these identities. For example, living as a brown queer person you can't separate these identities from each other. Therefore you are not simply experiencing the life of someone who is brown and someone who is queer, but a new experience that is different from both, and one that involves unique challenges. This concept can apply to any identity characteristic, such as, but not limited to, neurodiversity, social class, age, and disabilities, all of which influence one's experiences.</p>
Lived Experience:	<p>The knowledge someone brings from their own lives, backgrounds, challenges, and triumphs. It brings authentic and valued perspectives to the topic being discussed. When you live an experience, you cross an invisible barrier on a one-way ticket, whether you want to or not, and can see/sense/feel others who have lived experience too. Lived experience is about seeing things first-hand. It's something that can't be learnt or taught – it's unique, individual, and deeply personal. There is no right, no wrong, just life.</p>

<p>Lived Experience of Homelessness:</p>	<p>When we say “Lived Experience of Homelessness”, we mean anyone who has a first-hand experience of homelessness or the homelessness system. This could include but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients of our services • Attendees of our projects • People we meet in influencing work • Research participants • Steering group members • Our staff and volunteers • Campaigners we collaborate with
<p>Marginalised:</p>	<p>This term refers to groups or individuals who are pushed to the edge of the community or excluded from mainstream social, economic, or political activities. Marginalisation can occur due to various factors, including poverty, discrimination, or lack of access to resources. Marginalised groups often have limited power and influence.</p>
<p>Minority:</p>	<p>This term broadly refers to a group of people who are fewer in number compared to a larger group within a community. It can be used in various contexts, such as ethnic, racial, religious, or gender minorities. The term describes the numerical status of the group relative to the majority.</p>
<p>Minoritised:</p>	<p>This term is used to describe the process by which a group is made a minority through social, political, or economic mechanisms regardless of whether they are numerical minority or not. It highlights the active role of external forces in creating and perpetuating the minority status of a group. Groups may be minoritised through systemic discrimination or exclusionary practices. For example, women are minoritised in certain industries or positions of power.</p>
<p>Neurodivergence:</p>	<p>It is a term that describes the different ways people's brains can work. It means that some people think, learn, and experience the world differently from what is usually considered 'normal'. This term encompasses conditions such as Autism Spectrum Condition, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, and others.</p>

Neurodiversity:	The natural range of different brain types, ways of thinking and sensory experiences of the world. This idea values and celebrates these differences, recognising that they bring unique perspectives and skills to our world.
Non-extractive research:	Non-extractive research is a collaborative approach that prioritises relationships and mutual exchange over authoritative or exploitative dynamics. It involves working with participants rather than conducting research on or for them. This method values contributions from all parties, fostering an environment where both researchers and participants learn from one another. By focusing on empowerment, autonomy, and meaningful involvement, non-extractive research ensures that the knowledge produced is relevant and beneficial to those directly impacted, rather than merely extracting stories or insights for academic or institutional gain.
Peer:	A peer is an individual who is of equal standing with another and who belongs to a specific community, sharing distinct characteristics or experiences with this group.
Peer Research:	Peer research is a revolutionary approach to research that empowers individuals by giving them control over the subject matter, with a focus on working from the ground up . It is deeply rooted in lived or shared experiences , with peer researchers bringing their personal insights to the process. Though it's a relatively new concept , it demands status and recognition on a par with traditional research , while challenging existing power dynamics . Peer research blurs the lines between insider and outsider perspectives . The process tends to be more relaxed and adaptable to diverse learning styles.
Pronouns:	The term someone chooses to describe their gender, which may or may not be the same as their assigned gender at birth, for example, he, she, they, xey. Newer pronouns are called “neo-pronouns” and can often be unfamiliar, but they function the same.

Temporary Accommodation (TA):	TA is temporary housing for people who are experiencing homelessness while their local council helps them to find a more permanent solution. People placed in TA tend to be placed under a license agreement, which offers no tenancy rights because the accommodation is intended to be a short-term solution. However, people may now live in TA for years.
Trauma:	Justlife defines trauma as an experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, marked by reactions to situations that induce feelings of helplessness or terror. Trauma often involves a loss of safety and control, coupled with fears of serious harm or death. For instance, homelessness can be a severe trauma that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, often resulting from relationship breakdowns, financial difficulties or poverty. Those experiencing homelessness may also face additional trauma from unsafe living conditions and repeated violence, further compounding their distress.
Trauma-Informed:	A Trauma-Informed Approach recognises the impact of trauma and focuses on creating safe environments that avoid triggering individuals. It emphasises the importance of both physical and emotional safety , ensuring that practices are responsive to individuals' needs without limiting their access or autonomy . This approach should aim to foster post-trauma growth and recovery while maintaining inclusion and preventing discrimination against those who have experienced traumatic events by ensuring their participation .
Triggering:	'Triggering' refers to something that causes a strong emotional reaction, often by reminding someone of a difficult or traumatic experience. Depending on the research topic, peer researchers may have personal experiences of trauma related to the subject matter, which could bring up painful memories and emotions. This may also occur when interacting with individuals still facing similar circumstances.

Appendix A. How to Set Up a Peer Research Group Workbook



How to use this Book

This workbook goes with part 1 of the manual “How to Set Up a Peer Research Group”. Each of the guiding questions from that section is in this book, with space to give your answers, brainstorm and track your progress, along with key points and quotes from the manual to help prompt your thinking.

We developed this companion workbook based on feedback from the groups who worked with us and tested version one of the manual. We hope you will find it useful on your journey into peer research!

Preparing and Planning

A key consideration when starting a peer research project is to think about what your motivations might be for doing so.

Are you looking to gain new insights, collaborate on a shared problem, empower your participants or work more collaboratively?

How will you capture, facilitate and utilise unique insights and what purpose does gaining these serve?

Prompting thought from the manual....

"Is what you're getting worth the time / energy / emotion / resource commitment. Is there a safer, more thorough way? Do you have to trade some of these things off for others?"

Why do you want to carry out peer research?

What are some gaps in traditional research, which peer research might reach?

THE BASICS - CHECKLIST

Much of the below list 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.

- Focus: A general idea of the area of research and who you want to work with.
- Budget: In addition to staff and venue costs, peers and participants should be reimbursed for their time, as well as having a budget for basic stationery resources, IT equipment and snacks.
- 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.
- 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 peer needs private support. Depending on the topic, the sessions may be difficult for some (e.g. triggering traumatic responses). Facilitators with research and facilitation skills are recommended.
- Policies: You will need the relevant safeguarding policies and guidelines on research ethics. Also, see Appendix B for our lived experience reward policy.
- 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.

Recruitment

When planning peer research, it's vital to ensure meaningful collaboration. Recruitment should be transparent, with clear expectations, and the value of lived experience should be recognised, as it brings authentic perspectives to the project. These questions will guide you through this process.

Who do you want to be involved? If you can, get specific (ie. if you already know individuals who will be involved!)

Which demographics are you aiming to work with, and why?

Which organisations or community groups might be involved?

How many peers/participants are you planning to form your peer research group?

What might be barriers for the people you hope to work with?

Which of these barriers can you dismantle for the people you hope to work with, and how?

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?

With all the above in mind, consider who will do what on the project. Include everyone, from organisational admin to the peer researchers themselves. We've given you some extra space to bring all the elements together here!

Expenses

Expenses refer to any reasonable costs incurred while participating in involvement work, which must be directly related to the tasks performed. Organisations should clearly outline which expenses will be covered and communicate this to participants.

How will you pay or reimburse your peers and participants, and have you allocated a budget specifically for these payments, including potential expenses? What is that budget?

Examples of reasonable expenses from the manual...

- Public transport and fuel
- Parking and taxi costs
- Childcare and personal assistance
- Translation or interpretation services
- Meals, subsistence, and accommodation for overnight stays
- Equipment costs

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. Having adequate time encourages a sense of openness and psychological safety

Are you planning to take days, weeks or months with your training?

How will you use your time and resources to structure meetings in a way that builds trust, accommodates different learning styles, and ensures psychological safety while preventing burnout?

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?

How will you ensure the facilitators and organisational partners are part of the reflection process?

Accessibility

Accessibility is more than simply physically accessing a space. We feel that accessibility is about logistics as well as making everyone feel comfortable and included. While developing this manual, we discovered the following types of accessibility that are important to consider:

Use this space to brainstorm what each of these mean to you, and if there's anything you would add.

- Logistical
- Physical
- Sensory
- Psychological
- Digital
- Content

What kind of accessibility needs might there be in the group (peers, participants and facilitators)?

Consider the previous page 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.

Support and Safety

Conducting peer research involves navigating potentially difficult and triggering conversations, making it essential to prioritise support and safety.

What might be difficult topics for your peers and participants in this project?

What kind of support will you realistically be able to offer peers and participants? E.g., one-to-ones, signposting, or just in-session pastoral care?

How will you build space and time for reflection for facilitators 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.

***Prompting thought
from the manual....***

"we planned to have built-in safety nets—swap out with peers and facilitators if someone needs to take a break; support is available. Opt in and out."

Knowledge Exchange – non-extractive research

Peer research thrives on conversations and relationships where there is a bit of give and take, rather than being authoritative or extractive. This collaborative dynamic mirrors the essence of storytelling and creativity, where everyone involved contributes meaningfully to the process.

What's in it for your peers and participants? What will they gain from their involvement?

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

Prompting thought from the manual....

“Research is done with the participant, and not to the participant. Walk alongside the participant.”

Notes

Appendix B. Project Information Pack

The Justlife peer researcher Role Description

Do you have lived experience of homelessness and a keen interest in research? We are looking for people passionate about addressing the gaps in service design for individuals experiencing homelessness in temporary or emergency accommodation (TA/EA).

Peer Research

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting the research.

It aims to empower people to affect positive change by participating in research on their own communities.

Peer researchers (also referred to as 'community researchers') use their lived experience and understanding of a social or geographical community to help generate information about their peers for research purposes.

Research vs. Campaigning

It's important to differentiate between research and campaigning:

- Research: Investigating to gather evidence and understand a topic, without a predetermined solution that may help support change through campaigns or other means.
- Campaigning: Engaging the public to achieve a specific goal that has already been decided.

The Problem

Currently, there's a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to service design, disregarding the individual identities of people living in TA/EA.

What You'll Be Doing:

- Testing a step-by-step, co-produced peer research manual which was created by the pilot peer research group formed in phase 1 of the project.
- Participate in group training sessions to learn about peer research, research ethics, intersectionality, and various research methods.
- Work with other peer researchers and facilitators to develop and test ideas to gather community knowledge of TA/EA including designing research approaches, data collection methods, and data analysis tools.

Time

Peer researchers will meet bi-weekly on Wednesdays 11 am - 1 pm as a group and also complete some individual self-led tasks outside of these set times.

Who are we looking for?

- People with lived experience of homelessness
- Individuals who are passionate about creating positive change using evidence-based approaches
- Someone who is keen to work with other peer researchers in a group setting

Perks and Benefits:

- Opportunity to create a meaningful impact in your community.
- Training and support are provided by experienced facilitators from Justlife.
- Flexible working arrangements with optional attendance at group meetings.
- Personal and professional development opportunities.
- Rewarded for your time by voucher or bank transfer

To find out more about what you can expect, you can read a peer research blog co-produced by the pilot peer research group detailing their experiences.

Appendix C. Justlife Lived Experience Reward and Expenses Policy

SAMPLE POLICY – Please note, this is a sample of our internal lived experience expenses policy and procedures. It has been edited for brevity and is meant as an example template. It is not our live policy document.

Introduction

Justlife is committed to working with people with lived experience of homelessness in order 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 recognition that people with lived experience should be rewarded for sharing their expertise and time and ensuring all expenses are reimbursed.

Purpose

This policy and procedure 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/gift so everyone is clear on how the system works.

Lived Experience Expenses Policy

Who is eligible for Lived Experience Reward?

All people who have lived experience of homelessness and are supporting a Justlife project in a clearly stipulated role (such as those listed below) are eligible to receive rewards. This includes people with past experience in addition to those currently experiencing homelessness.

Levels of participation and reward

Participation Activity	Reward
Providing Feedback	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Interview - respondent (research)	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Interview Panel	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Peer Researcher	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Co-Production workshop(s)	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Service Designer	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Steering Group Meeting	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE
Training	REIMBURSEMENT AMOUNT GOES HERE

Methods of reward

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

- Bank Transfer
- Vouchers (electronic or paper, to be agreed by project lead and participant)

All completed payments must be added to our internal payment log.

Reward payment process

Payment can be gifted to the participant at the end of each week or monthly, with the method and frequency agreed with the participant at the initial one-to-one meeting.

Payment will be issued for hours attended by the previously agreed method.

A log of all payments will be kept by the project team.

Rewards and Benefits

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

It is the responsibility of the participant to let the relevant bodies know that they are participating in this role if required.

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

More guidance on this can be found in our staff FAQ or the [Payment for Involvement Playbook](#).

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.

If expenses cannot be paid in advance by the project team, expenses will be reimbursed by 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 in order to contribute toward the mission, vision, and values of Justlife, without concern of financial gain.

Further reading:

- [Understanding work, advisory roles and benefits](#) from Social Care Institute for Excellence
- [Payment for Involvement Playbook](#) from Social Change Agency



Justlife

 www.justlife.org.uk

 [justlife-foundation](#)

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