

‘Getting Involved in Research’ Workshops

I AM MORE THAN ...

Research Engagement Network (REN)

Research with those who have experienced homelessness/being vulnerably housed



Background

This report captures key learning points from two ‘Getting Involved in Research’ workshops, held in Weymouth and Bournemouth, which brought together Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) from across Dorset to explore their interest in research, how they want to be involved, benefits for the communities they support, and how a community research network can best support them.

The Research Engagement Network Programme Cohort 2 (REN2) is an initiative by NHS England who provided funding to Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) across the country to bring the voice of people and communities into health and care research. Research has traditionally excluded many voices, both in who participates and who conducts it. In Dorset, we chose to focus on designing ways of capturing the diversity of who is (and isn’t) involved in research and connecting with people with experience of being homeless and vulnerably housed. This group is one of the most excluded and marginalised in Dorset and we anticipated that co-creating inclusive ways of involving them in research could have long lasting impact on them, on the relevance and impact of our research and on developing ways of involving other communities who are under-served by research.

With this, and additional funding from Clinical Research Network Wessex, we have been working since October 2023 with trusted community partners and community researchers (those with lived experience of the topic being explored) to enable people who have experienced homelessness and being vulnerably housed to design how they want to be involved and have a voice in research. Based on their involvement, this part of the project became known as ‘**I am more than...**’.

Phase 3 of the REN2 Programme has focussed on building capacity in VCSOs who are working with a wide range of communities, beyond those who are homeless and vulnerably housed, to engage in inclusive research. With this in mind, we delivered a series of online webinars, followed up by two in-person ‘Getting Involved in Research’ workshops in Weymouth and Bournemouth. The workshops were co-created and delivered by Bournemouth University’s PIER (Public Involvement in Education and Research) partnership, The Lantern Trust, The HealthBus, and CAN drawing on their expertise and deep community connections.

The in-person ‘Getting involved in research’ workshops were aimed at voluntary and community sector organisations, no matter their size or previous research experience. In response to a small grant initiative to encourage participation in developing Research Hubs, when asked ‘**why are organisations interested in this project?**’, respondees said:

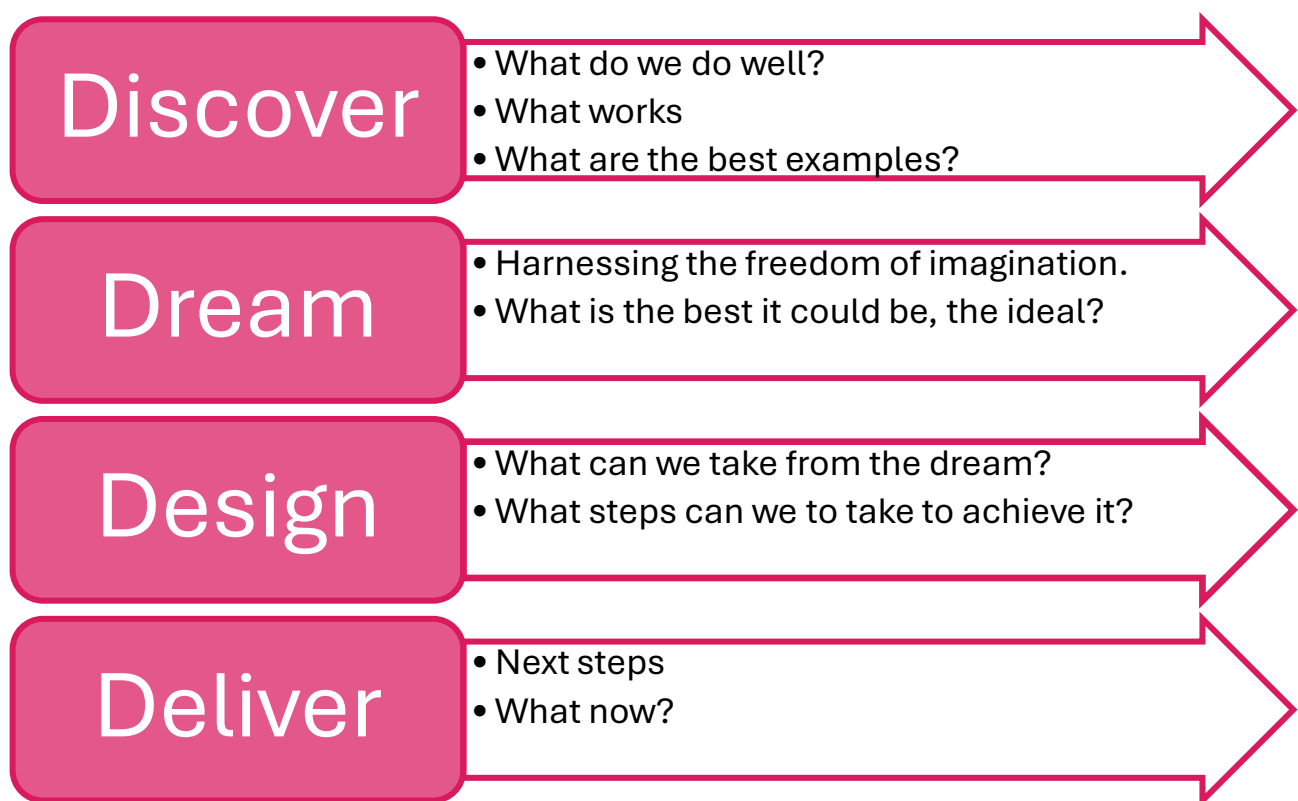
- To strengthen the voice of the VCS sector and increase influence in research and funding opportunities.
- To build a shared understanding of community needs and improve collaboration.
- To learn from each other’s experiences and apply research to practice.

- To involve people with lived experience in shaping health and social care research.
- To create a stronger, evidence-led case for service development and policy change.

This helped to shape the discussion in the two workshops, which were designed to help voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations:

- Understand research opportunities and how to get involved.
- Access funding for research and capacity-building projects.
- Explore what research means for your organisation through interactive workshops.

The workshops were based on the **Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Model**: Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver:



Across the two workshops, there were 24 attendees, representing VCISOs from across Dorset. The data in this report is drawn from two sources:

1. Throughout each workshop, attendees were invited to capture their thoughts and comments on flipchart paper, post it notes, and Pledge cards.
2. Attendees were asked to complete a short survey at the end of each workshop.

Data were then collated from both workshops and analysed to identify key themes. Findings are presented here under each stage of the 4-D model: Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver. Key findings from the analysis of all source data are then captured under six themes, showing what attendees want from a community research hub or network.

Discover

Attendees identified examples of where community involvement in research is already being done well, including:

1. Older Men's Carers' study - GP experience
2. Brain Wave charity
3. Parkinson's dance weekly classes which were a collaboration between a scientist and a dancer
4. Dorset Research Engagement Network (REN) project with people who are homeless and vulnerably housed
5. Talbot Village Trust Family Craft Sessions
6. 'We were at our best during COVID-19 with no bureaucracy; we were strong, fast and took action.'

Dream:

Attendees were then asked to envisage a future community research hub or network and what this could be if there were no limits or constraints. In line with Appreciative Inquiry methodology, attendees were encouraged to dream big. Their contributions are summarised in the following word cloud:



Design - Summary of Key Themes and how they were informed:

Following on from the Discover and Dream stages, attendees were invited to explore what elements of discover and dream could be drawn on to inform the design phase, and the design a community research hub or network.

<p>1. We would like a diverse team, who can be involved without fear of judgement, prejudice, or pressure and with all parties approaching this project with an open-minded approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowing that by saying no, I'm not letting my community down - dipping in and out• Not feeling judged but accepted as a person• Engagement without pressure or assumption• There is equity• Start with an open mind• Unbiased• Engagement works when it's without pressure or judgment - it's a choice and with support• Neurodiversity• Increasing diversity in research• Shift and flex, not drift• Understanding - awareness of needs• Cognitive bias• A diverse research team or group• Nothing is wrong by being individual• Challenging preconceptions• Awareness of cognitive biases• Discover together• Room for nuance - be open• Open and inclusive knowledge production• Assumptions are often made about others needs• Non-hierarchical
<p>2. We would like coproduction, with all parties having equal chance to be involved, consulted, and listened to, in a way that works for them, so that all can feel they are a part of the outcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being valued as a partner• Sitting down and listening - really listening• Elevate voices of those not prioritised• Physically, mentally and spiritually• Be involved• Consultation• Everyone has their stamp on the project• People feel listened to/heard

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of the outcome • Values of people and their opinions their time • Engagement of people with lived experience and empowering • Flexibility/fluidity x9 • Creative methods of collection what works for different groups for example album covers • Awareness of power dynamics • Build research into what is already happening • Build in flex • On my terms • Coproduction • Valuing the community and lived experience perspective • Valuing peoples time • Everyone matters • One size does not fit all, being flexible with the approach • Building the research into what we are already doing • Understanding the power dynamics • Meeting people where they are at • Exploring with local people • When we ask questions, they must mean something to those being asked • Conceptualise and gather data in a flexible way • Co-produced evaluation • Mandate policy to be co-designed
<p>3. We would like to have full awareness of all the support options and access to all the available resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing where to go to get support and get what I need • Not feeling burdened to do it, being offered or invited • Knowing what I can do and knowing what is not for me • Support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not reliant on any one individual at any point • Given the right resources • Awareness of community support • People knowing services exist • Good facilitation and access to resources • Clarity around the roles on offer at BU for example research coordinator • Access to research funding • Community organisations sharing what they do e.g community voices webinar sharing resources train the trainer courses • Linking in with experts/academics - research to scope the project • Investing in the person giving the support to the community researcher • Community support workers are key • Access to other research to get a benchmark • Access means including children
<p>4. We would like a clear network, which allows for information sharing re research and funding opportunities, and all other relevant knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazing bridge builders - it's about existing community relationships • Network of VCS to co-design research • Confidence to work in research partnerships - be shovel-ready for research • Interrogate what research means and in what form it comes, engaging the community from within the community. That it is worth being part of it as something tangible will happen • Opportunities to learn and network • Well informed • Clear communication • Designated points of contact • Clear pathways to impact, so not a waste of time • Collaboration, bringing organisations together • VCOSOs have a shared understanding of challenges/landscape/community • Bringing groups together - conversations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCISOs as community ‘bridge builders’ and enablers of participation • Network with shared values • Cascading how to become a researcher • Funding and resources must be long-term/sustainable to allow network to flourish • No ‘silos’ of excellence – mechanism to bring together • Shared access to knowledge base ‘living library’
<p>5. We would like to explore new ways of working, benefits to individuals and evidence of impact of these changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘If you do what you’ve always done, you will get what you’ve always had’ • New way, innovative approach, excitement • Balance of feeling exciting and part of making change for my community but not burdened by the weight of responsibility - need to share the load • Finding ways to change the bigger picture • Evidencing impact of services - especially new or different areas and funding • Cascade • Change and influence change • Community-led outcomes and measures of success • When stakeholders are involved and invested in change • Clear purpose and end goal - what is it for • How do you quantify benefit? • Benefit to individual or research • There are benefits beyond the research • Developmental evaluation • Noting and seeing the benefits and ripple effects • When the research makes a difference • Impact and understanding it and demonstrating it • Consistency in feedback/feedback loop • Cultural shift

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow communities to feel they can define research and research participation'
<p>6. We would like to build a sense of community investment, loyalty and trusting relationships, even if it takes time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owe it to the community • Connect • Community, connect, curiosity, change, confidence, collaboration, consultation, capability, creativity • Loyalty to the project • Curiosity in what is happening • Curiosity • Relationship based • Consistency in people involved • Support each other • Willingness to engage • Building the relationships • Communication: honesty, clear understanding, trust • Ultra local (knowing/part of community) • Humanely driven • Relationship forming - soft outcomes which are difficult to formally collate. • Time • Relationships • Invest in time to build relationships and be meaningfully involved and involvement is inclusive • Not rushing • Trust • Having trust from the funders • Prevent overburdening through trust and sharing

The responses align strongly around shared values: community voice, collaboration, inclusivity, and using research to drive practical change.

Specific ideas from the Design Phase:

Virtual Hub for shared resources and information:

- Access to skills and responsive support e.g. mentoring/buddy system, presentations skills, research skills, matchmaking, webinars, help with applications
- Drop-in sessions
- Reading lists/toolkits/pathways
- Accessible venue
- Buy-in from people in power
- Community support workers are needed
- Responsive, rather than reactive
- Fundraising

Questions Raised:

- What do we want to prioritise?
- What are we not measuring
- Are we asking the right question?
- What are other charities doing?
- What is the aim?
- What do people need in order to take part?
- What does the person need to get the most out of the experience?
- How will this enable better outcomes?
- Who are the policymakers?
- What barriers are you experiencing?

Deliver:

For the final stage of the 4-D model, attendees were invited to commit to undertaking actions or steps to help make this happen.

Individual Pledges:

1. I will do a 4Ds session in a team meeting – many heads!
2. I will fully commit to qualitative data collection and community groups and learn how to present it in an engaging way.
3. Share details of bipolar self-help to our patients
4. Create an exhibition with Pavilion Dance
5. Share charity details on our weekly update that are OK and relevant
6. Introduce our KTP research associate to the network to see how others might contribute to a family carers (LD) project
7. At a meeting share a questionnaire for the group to ask what they get from the group, and what they want from the group, and discuss with the group all ideas

8. Supervision for Co-facilitators is essential!
9. Explore new creative activities for the bipolar support group
10. Decide on a venue to hold a weekly group consider timings facilities i.e., creche
11. Design a flyer or invitation to invite parents/ family affected by exploitation to a meeting with food
12. Find out if there is a need for a local group to support parents and family members affected by exploitation
13. Share Bel's 'I am more than...' work with our staff
14. Contact Mel at Southampton Uni' to learn about LD research techniques
15. Solutions don't come from the outside...
16. Focus on reducing barriers in research. Ask: what do you need to be able to take part or be involved for example funding food mode of communication timing it's got to be on the person's terms feedback give something back for example sharing findings and actions with patient organisations
17. Access: connect with others to set up transport options to classes and events. Enforce the idea of pay as you *can*. 'Stay and play' into daytime classes. Use the canvas idea in education
18. I'm going to remember hosting food creativity and nature when thinking about research
19. I'm going to ask for help in designing the citizen panel to ensure I make access easy but who? Time is short
20. I'm going to talk with Mel about our impact and insight KTP idea
21. Hold a focus group with partner organisations about how we can better utilise the population. Access: focus groups shared impact data governance resources
22. Share with this group my own experience of building a practitioner network
23. Find practical ways to build collaborative research with our existing and new VCO partners, e.g., Pavilion Dance
24. Connect with people here about the 'I am more than project...' relevance to my context
25. Share my learning from this way of working with students, colleagues, and people with lived experience. Role modelling inclusive research and working co-productively, flipping the power. I pledge to take these values and ideas with me in my career, I want to continue research and teach nurses. This inclusive way of working and flipping of the power will influence me and how I practice.
26. Commitment to share more about who we are and what we do
27. Commitment to be a 'well' me
28. Being a positive influence in how I use my life
29. I commit to continuing supporting and sympathising with people with respect whilst honouring myself
30. Make these ideas real and tangible through supporting the work at CAN and carrying forward values and practises
31. To rehabilitate the image of qualitative data. Hasta la victoria siempre! [Until victory, always!] I pledge to make myself available to support any product of this workshop. I also

pledge to take the principles and ideas I have learned and apply them throughout my volunteering and work

32. Contribute to the development of a community-led network and keep Bournemouth University on board
33. Learn to use appreciative inquiry to help develop ideas, concepts and questions that need exploring
34. Determine how research and our involvement can aid progress for our beneficiaries and help to determine our focus and why
35. Understand what we as an organisation can offer, support and commit to for the benefit of the local area
36. To advocate for community-led, designed, analysed research and knowledge production
37. To work collaboratively to discover and learn more about the ways in which data can be interrogated inclusively so as to create truly equitable and equal actions and solutions
38. I pledge to be open to be used as a living library in a bid to share personal lived experience but also to share knowledge gained from my role as a community researcher so as to increase the base platform of knowledge available for all with the aim to shed light on individual difficulties and struggles so as to create a more level playing field in the battle for creating a better future for all
39. Advocate for the genuine involvement of young people in service design and policy making
40. Undertake more activities that increase pithy including with young people who may be engaged in research or influencing policy
41. Connect with the community organisations that I am not familiar with after today to continue conversations

Questionnaire Responses:

Following the workshops, attendees were asked by CAN to complete a feedback questionnaire

When asked about the benefits of a Community Research Hub, people most often chose:

- Connecting with other organisations
- Accessing research funding
- Building skills and confidence
- Learning from good examples and case studies
- Finding researchers to work with

Some added that the hub could be a place to:

- Meet like-minded people
- Share digital tools and skills
- Raise voices that are often left out of decision-making

To take part in a Community Research Hub, people said they might need:

- Clear invitations and expectations
- Face-to-face meetings
- Guidance and flexibility
- Time and capacity
- Ways to involve young people or people with lived experience
- Support for groups spread across large areas
- Buy-in from people in power
- Community support workers
- Accessible venue

Further topics people are interested in exploring include:

- How to get funding for research
- Creative and community-friendly ways to do research
- Tools for gathering and presenting findings easily
- Hearing voices that are often ignored
- Working with young people
- Turning research into action and policy change

In future workshops, respondees asked for:

- More practical tools they can use day-to-day
- Examples of successful community research
- Time to move around and speak with more people
- Help with funding and how to apply for it
- Clearer language and more plain English explanations
- Pre-workshop information to set expectations

Most people said the workshop helped them feel more confident about getting involved in research.

Some said:

- It helped make research feel “less overwhelming”
- It showed clear ways to start getting involved

A few still feel unsure, especially about the language used in research or the next steps for their organisation.

Conclusion – Evaluation of the workshops

The combined data from the workshops and evaluations show that there is a real energy and interest in community-led research and a community research hub and network to support involvement in research; VCISOs want to work together, share ideas, and learn how to turn their knowledge into real change, but they also require clear support and ways to get started.

The findings from this report will inform phase 4 of the Dorset Research Engagement Network and the pilot and evaluation of a community research hub.

Contact information

The report has been compiled on behalf of the *I am more than...* project team and partners. To discuss any aspect of the report, please contact Stevie Corbin Clarke and Professor Mel Hughes scorbinclarke@bournemouth.ac.uk and mhughes@bournemouth.ac.uk

For further information on the wider project:

<https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/projects/research-engagement-people-who-have-experienced-homelessness>

<https://can100.org/connecting-communities/i-am-more-than/>