

Developing Inclusive Research Networks

The *I am more than...* project

Stakeholder Event Report - Phase Two



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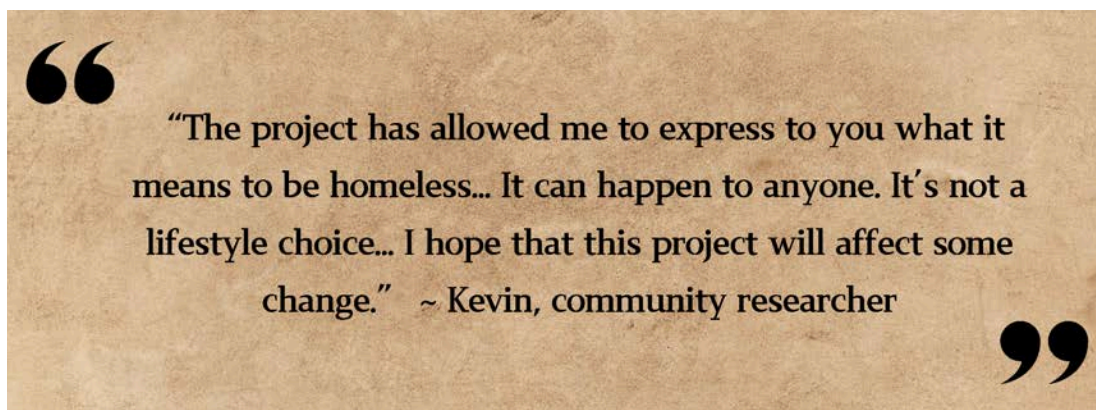
HEALTHBUS
Specialist Healthcare for People Experiencing Homelessness

NHS
Dorset HealthCare University
NHS Foundation Trust

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Introduction



This report captures key learning from the second stakeholder event held at the end of phase two of the Dorset *I am more than..* project. The event report is one of several outputs documenting findings from the project and shares our learning from co-designing and implementing an inclusive approach for people with lived experience of being homeless or vulnerably housed, to have a voice in research. The report covers background to the event, purpose, methods, who attended, data collected, key themes, findings and next steps in the development of an inclusive approach for ensuring that marginalised and excluded communities have a voice in health and social care research.

Background

Phase two of the *I am more than...* project was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Clinical Research Network (CRN) Wessex (now the NIHR South Central Regional Research Delivery Network) enabling us to further develop and embed our co-designed and inclusive approach to involving people who are homeless and vulnerably housed in research. Phase one of the *I am more than..* project started in October 2023 as part of The Research Engagement Network Programme Cohort 2 (REN2), an initiative by NHS England who provided funding to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) across the country to bring the voice of people and communities into health and care research. In Dorset, we chose to focus on

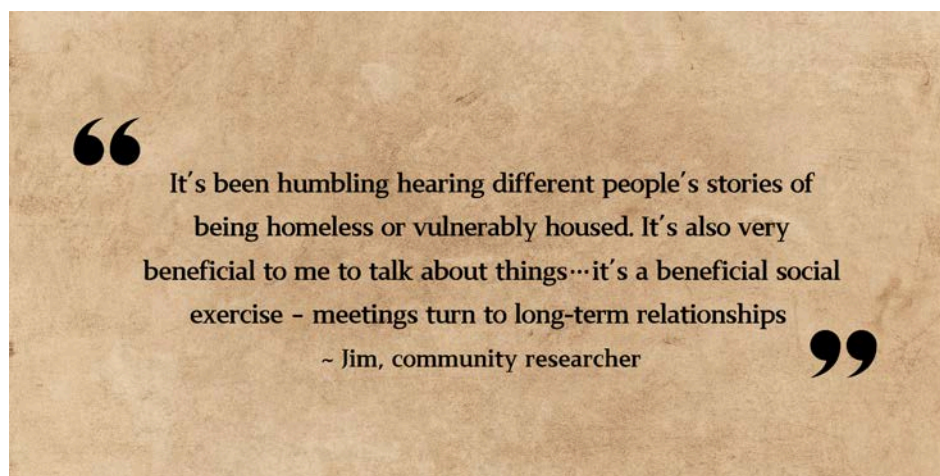
designing ways of capturing the diversity of who is (and isn't) involved in research and connecting with people with experience of being homeless and vulnerably housed. Our thinking was that this group was one of the most excluded and marginalised in Dorset and co-creating inclusive ways of involving them in research could have long lasting impact on them, on the relevance, quality and impact of our research and on developing ways of involving other communities who are under-served by research.

Phase one culminated in a [stakeholder event in March 2024](#) and the development of the following dream for what having a voice in research could be:



This dream guided our work for phase two of the *I am more than..* project from March to September 2024 funded by NIHR CRN Wessex. In September 2024, we secured continuation funding from NHS England to embed the approach across Dorset; to broaden its use with other marginalised and excluded groups, and to build capacity within the voluntary and community sector to drive this change. We expect to report on phase three in April 2025.

The *I am More Than...* project



Through phases one and two we have been working 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....*'

The Lantern Trust, Bournemouth HealthBus Trust, Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust and Bournemouth University PIER (Public Involvement in Education and Research) Partnership recruited, mentored and supported community researchers with lived experience to participate in the project and reach out to people in their wider communities and networks to better understand involvement in research from their perspectives. A series of events including presentations, showcases of art and creative work and two stakeholder events have enabled us to bring together partners across homeless communities (people with lived experience of being homeless and vulnerably housed, volunteers and staff) and people from health and social care communities (researchers, practitioners and leaders) to share

perspectives, make connections, learn from each other and embed more inclusive approaches to involvement into practice.

Quotes from stakeholders on the impact on them of the *I am more than...* project

“Day one was inspirational... the importance of listening to, and working alongside... co-production and working together” (Frances Aviss, Head of Engagement, NHS Dorset)

“This project has helped us to be braver about the recommendations we make. We used to be less likely to recommend co-production in our reports due to a concern that it wouldn’t be achieved. This project encouraged us to be braver and make these recommendations” (Louise Bate, Manager, Healthwatch Dorset).

“I hope that the first stakeholder event led to attendees being more open-minded and less judgemental. I have had the pleasure of overseeing the progress of the project from the outset and feel privileged to be a member of the Steering Group. We were delighted to fund the continuation of this inspiring work in Dorset. In particular, it will provide important resources for research delivery in communities under-served by research.” (Zoe Sheppard, Research Delivery Manager for Public Health, Social Care, Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement, and Communities Under-Served by Research | South Central Regional Research Delivery Network).

“It’s encouraging that we’re working together – it gives me hope and connections. It can feel isolating when you’re trying to bring about change and this helps... it gives me encouragement to continue and to do things differently” (Kate Parker, Strategic Lead, Shelter Dorset).

Methods

The aim of the second stakeholder event was to create an inclusive, shared space for people from the homeless community and people from the health and social care community to critically reflect on the inclusive *I am more than..* approach and contribute to the co-design of an inclusive approach for collaborating in research with marginalised groups more broadly. For the full day event, we drew on principles of co-production (collaborating as equal partners for equal benefit);

world café methods (bringing together a diverse range of voices to talk and explore together in small groups) and appreciative inquiry (a transformative, collaborative and energising process which focuses on exploring what works and what can be (for a good introduction see <https://i2insights.org/2024/01/16/using-appreciative-inquiry/>)).

Stakeholder event two was based around three questions:

- What have we learnt so far?
- What do we need to implement the *I am more than..* inclusive approach into our everyday practice?
- How will we get what we need?



52 people attended Stakeholder event two. 27 identified as being from the health and care community and 25 from the homeless community. Attendees included those from voluntary and community sector organisations, the NHS, local councils, research and academia from across Dorset and the wider Wessex and South Central region.

Data Analysis

Throughout the event, attendees were invited to capture their thoughts and comments on flipchart paper, post it notes and Pledge cards. Data from all of these have been harvested and analysed to create themes. The themes are presented separately for each of the three questions explored on the day 1) what we have learnt so far; 2) what we need to implement *I am more than..* in our everyday practice and 3) how we will get what we need. Analysis was completed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework.



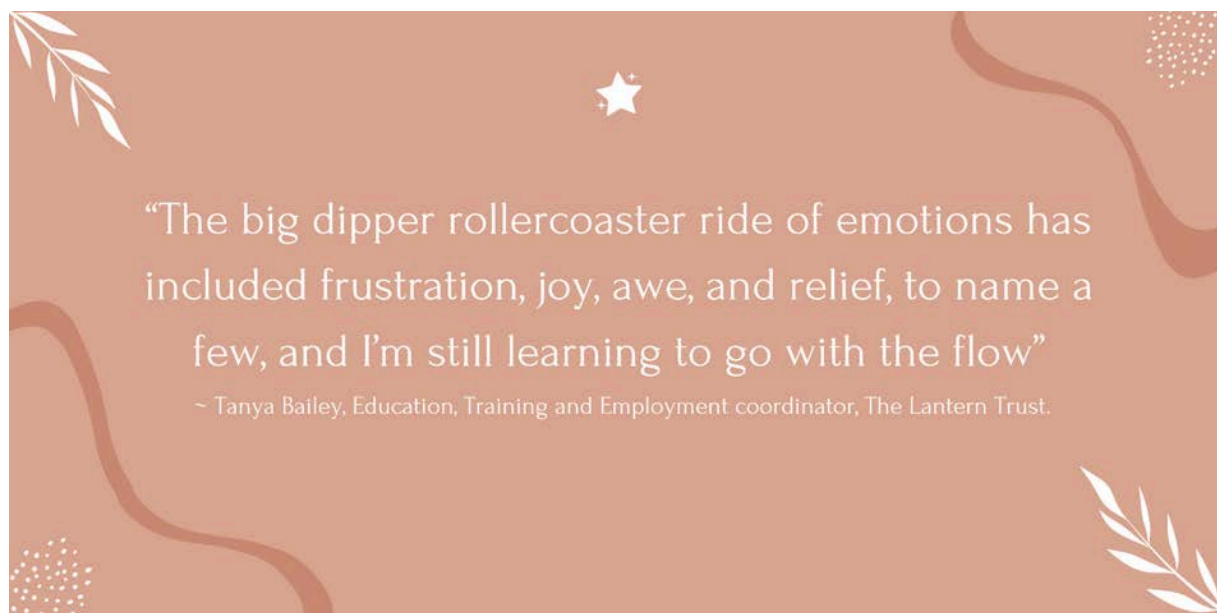
Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth,
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Findings

Q1: What We Have Learnt So Far?

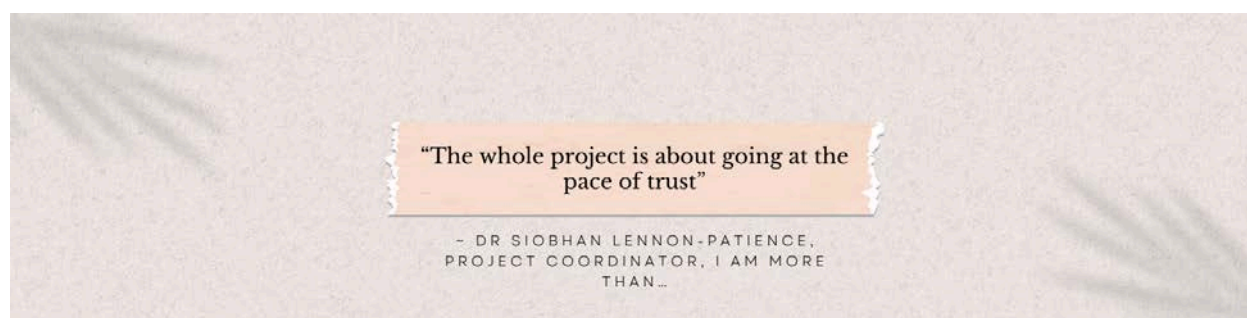
Theme 1: Navigating Complexity: *‘embracing the messy’*

attendees identified challenges in navigating existing systems, reflecting on the need for clear methodologies and frameworks. attendees wanted to build their confidence in knowing how to embed more inclusive approaches into their practice (knowing where to start) and there was acknowledgement of the need to have confidence to ‘embrace the messy’ when collaborating with people in a more fluid and reactive way than systems may currently allow. The community partners involved in facilitating the project reflected on how the approach involves a lot of trial and error and a need to focus on the goal of people having a voice rather than on set ways of achieving this. If people didn’t turn up, it didn’t mean they weren’t committed to the project.



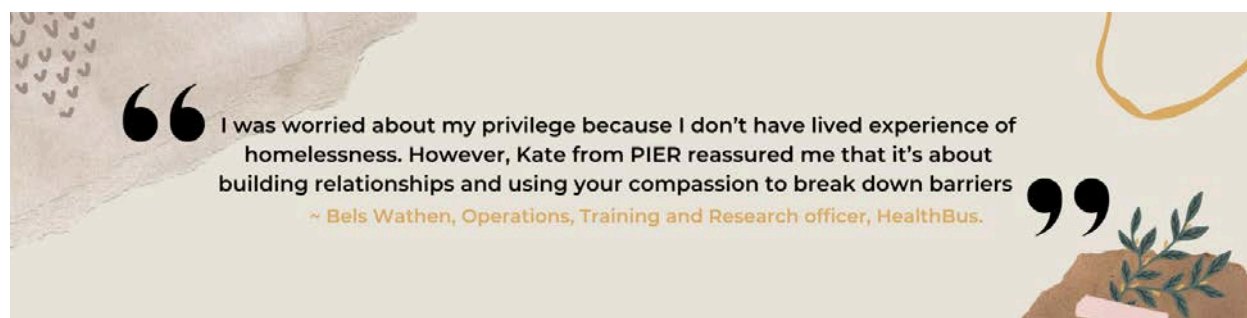
Theme 2: Empowering Inclusivity: *'it doesn't just happen'*

There was a sense in the reflections and discussions that inclusivity doesn't just happen and that understanding and addressing the power dynamics is required to co-create and develop shared values and be truly inclusive. It involves self-awareness, humility, reciprocity, role modelling, being bold and brave, and not diluting the vision.



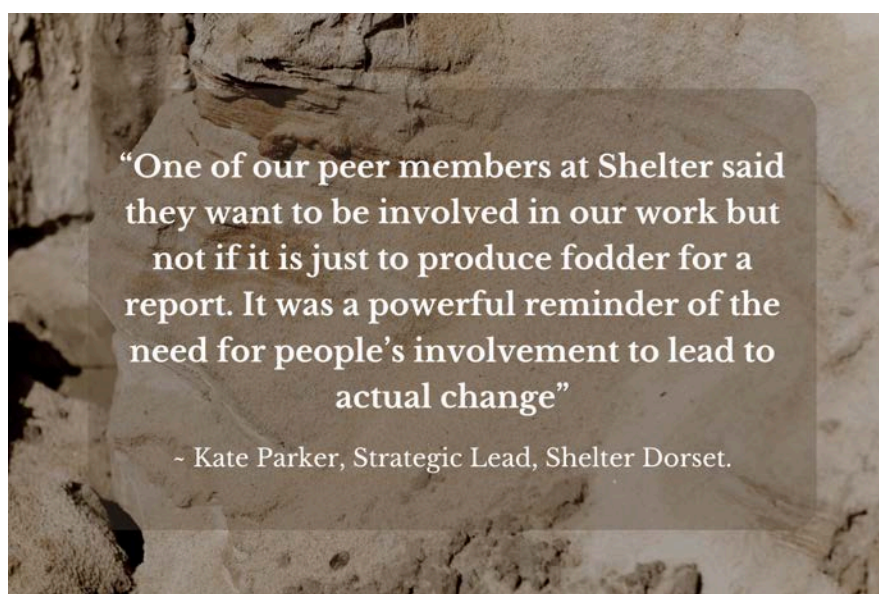
Theme 3: Embracing Humanity in Engagement: *'relationship first, task second'*

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of lived experience and personal connections which indicates a shift towards more empathetic and human-centred approaches to involvement in research, rather than more process and task-oriented approaches.



Theme 4: Building Trust Through Collaboration: *'Actions not words'*

There was a strong sense, especially from lived experience contributors, that trust is gained through action and not words. Building trusting relationships by collaborating was viewed as critical for effecting meaningful change.



Theme 5: Communication as a Catalyst for Change: *'it needs to make a difference'*

The power of communication in removing barriers and fostering understanding was seen as central to engaging communities and collaborating effectively. Communication was identified as a driver for change. This resonates with the appreciative inquiry research approach used to guide the event which suggests that *'change starts to happen as soon as you ask the first question'*.



Summary of What We Have Learnt So Far

The critical reflections on what we have learnt so far in the *I am more than..* project as captured by attendees in this second stakeholder event suggest a need for a nuanced understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness and approaches for involving and collaborating in research, emphasising the complexity of systems, the need for inclusivity, and the power of human connections. It advocates for a shift away from traditional metrics towards more holistic, relationship-based approaches to measure success. The themes highlight the importance of collaboration and communication as vital tools in overcoming barriers for involvement in research and fostering meaningful change in the community.

This learning shows the need for ongoing dialogue and innovative practices to effectively engage communities who are currently under-served by research, ensuring that their voices and experiences shape solutions to the challenges they face.

Q2: What do we need to implement the I am more than.. inclusive approach into our everyday practice?

We need:

Theme 1: Leadership and Commitment:

Leadership is critical for driving change, with a focus on genuine support and accountability. A commitment from attendees to this approach and way of working was clear but some attendees in health and care felt constrained by current systems and emphasised the importance of 'buy in' from senior leaders to drive this change.

Theme 2: Community-Centric Approach:

It was clear that successful engagement requires prioritising community input and involvement, fostering a collaborative environment. It involves shifting the balance away from listening and consultation toward active participation, collaboration and partnership working. It involved collaborating with communities not just individuals.



Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth,
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Theme 3: Cultural Transformation:

Organisation culture must evolve to embrace openness, understanding, and a commitment to inclusivity. It is the system that needs to change to be more inclusive if we are to increase the diversity of who is involved.

Theme 4: Sustainability and Strategic Vision:

Clear strategies and long-term planning are vital for achieving lasting impact and maintaining engagement. This will enable us to shift from project-by-project involvement to a longer term, embedded way of working with communities.

Theme 5: Empowerment through Capacity Building:

It was agreed that providing resources and education is essential for empowering communities to take action and to be meaningfully involved.

Theme 6: Creating Safe and Supportive Environments:

Establishing spaces for open dialogue and learning can encourage deeper engagement and trust and this requires support. Voluntary and community sector organisations are well placed to provide this.



Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth,
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Theme 7: Accountability and Impact:

Ensuring accountability for decisions and actions will help maintain focus on equity and the needs of all community members. We all need to be accountable for ensuring that listening moves into action if we are to achieve effective change.

Summary of what we need

This thematic analysis of what we need to embed the *I am more than..* inclusive approach highlighted the need for supportive leadership, inclusive practices, and a commitment to cultural and systemic transformation. Each theme represents a critical area that can foster positive change in community dynamics and enhance research and service delivery in meaningful ways.

Discussions emphasised the importance of collaboration, understanding, and sustained effort to engage and collaborate with communities effectively. By addressing these themes, organisations can work towards creating environments that support genuine participation and equitable outcomes. There was a strong sense that it was the system that needed to change to facilitate more inclusive and diverse involvement, as communities are keen to be involved if included in ways that are flexible and of benefit to them.

Q3: How We Will Get What We Need?

Theme 1: Effective Listening and Insight Gathering

By moving beyond listening toward really hearing, putting yourself in the shoes of others and seeking to understand each other's daily reality and lived experience. By sharing these insights and using them to inform practice and the basis of any co-designed plans for involvement and collaboration.



Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth,
Instagram: @Ferricksquibb

Theme 2: Leadership Engagement and Commitment

By senior leaders being involved and demonstrating commitment to engagement initiatives. By being present to benefit first-hand from direct involvement and collaboration.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Community Engagement

By ensuring mutuality in commissioning processes and fostering partnerships that prioritise community voices. We will achieve this by adopting a *Nothing about us without us* approach.

Theme 4: Empathy and Understanding in Research and Service Delivery

By engaging in empathetic listening and understanding lived experiences as part of engagement efforts. Getting to know the person and the community's realities, priorities and needs first.

Theme 5: Building Trust through Relationships

By developing trust through consistent reliable engagement and transparency.

Theme 6: Flexibility and Person-Centred Approaches

By shifting away from rigid and formalised processes toward adaptable, personalised methods of involvement that can evolve based on community and individual needs. By enabling people to be involved on their own terms and to drift in and out of opportunities as needed.



Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth, Instagram: @Ferricksquibb

Theme 7: Awareness and Education Initiatives

By engaging in campaigns that raise awareness and educate people from homeless communities (people with lived experience, volunteers and staff) and health and care communities (researchers, practitioners and leaders) about engagement models and needs. By providing opportunities for shared learning, collaboration, and reflections for anyone adopting this approach, such as regular events, webinars, mentoring or communities of practice.

Theme 8: Cultural and Perceptual Shifts

By changing the narrative around homelessness and the broader public perception of social issues and recognising and valuing lived experience expertise alongside academic and practice expertise.



Credit: Pauline Ferrick-Squibb, Arts University Bournemouth,
Instagram: @Ferricksquibb

Summary of how we will get what we need.

The themes identified from responses to the question of how we will get what we need to be able to implement more inclusive approaches to involvement in our research and practice, highlight critical components for fostering effective community engagement. By prioritising insight-driven listening, leadership commitment, and collaborative partnerships, organisations, researchers and leaders can better understand and respond to community needs. Focusing on empathy, trust, and being flexible and adaptable, will allow the co-creation of a supportive environment for meaningful involvement and change. By addressing these themes, organisations, researchers and leaders can work towards creating a more inclusive, understanding, and supportive community framework for public involvement in research, ultimately leading to more effective research, service delivery and positive social change.

Next Steps

The identification of themes across all three questions from the stakeholder event suggest a strong focus on empowerment, relationship-building, and the necessity for inclusive, flexible and adaptable approaches that challenge existing systems and assumptions. Each theme interconnects, emphasising that **effective change requires a holistic approach that values human experiences and fosters genuine connections**. System and cultural change is required to facilitate change that is sustainable (transformation).

The *I am more than..* project has shown how effective change can be achieved and what more inclusive ways of working can look like in practice. The project has shown how voluntary and community sector organisations who are embedded in their communities and already have trusted relationships with people and communities are best placed to provide this support and to drive change. **The involvement of voluntary and community sector organisations as drivers for change will be central to a sustainable, long term community framework for public involvement in research** and long-term resources will be required to support this.

As we move into phase three of the *I am more than..* project (September 2024 to April 2025), we will be guided by the learning documented within this event report. For everyone involved in the *I am more than..* project, including all attendees in the event, we invite you to put your learning and pledges into action and to share the impact with us as part of these next steps.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all attendees and participants for their valuable contributions to this research. Your insights and active engagement were instrumental in shaping the findings presented in this report.

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