

# YOUNG CHANGE MAKERS

Coming together to reimagine  
mental health services



## A guide to peer research

UK YOUTH



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## OVERVIEW OF THE YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS PROGRAMME

Young Changemakers is a programme by The Diana Award, Centre for Mental Health, and UK Youth, with funding thanks to the players of the People's Postcode Lottery and Comic Relief. The Young Changemakers programme is led by and for young people from Black and Black-mixed heritage communities to reimagine mental health support and services. Local youth organisations support Young Changemakers to design and deliver their own social action projects to create lasting impact within their communities.

Centre for Mental Health recruited young people from the Young Changemakers programme as peer researchers, engaging them in various research projects designed to enhance their skills.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

- 🕒 **Centre for Mental Health** is responsible for establishing the evaluation methodology and impact tools across the project. They resource a peer research model to lead the research phase, arm in arm with young people.
- 🕒 **The Diana Award** is responsible for coordinating the youth development journey including leading on content for youth organisations to train young people in social action, mental health awareness and social/emotional skills. They also manage the project Co-Producers, focusing on delivering upskilling sessions and exploring opportunities for young people to get involved in the wider programme.
- 🕒 **UK Youth** is the lead partner and manages the coordination of project stakeholders, alongside supporting the delivery of youth-led Young Changemakers social action projects, supported by youth workers within local youth organisations.

## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

The guide aims to showcase the benefits of involving young people in peer research, especially in the field of youth mental health, and to offer practical guidance on how to do so effectively. It serves as a comprehensive guide, offering practical tips for conducting peer research with young people, particularly those from marginalised and racialised communities.

### **How this guide was developed**

To establish how young people can be better involved in peer research, we engaged with peer researchers from the Young Changemakers programme and discussed topics relating to why and how young people can be supported to do peer research. During our conversations with young people, we uncovered several key themes including simplifying research language, allowing flexibility, providing consistent support, and providing a clear understanding of goals and how to achieve them. The next section explores these themes.

### **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to the peer researchers involved in the Young Changemakers programme – Ashleigh Onabajo, Amarno Inai, and Crown Agabi – who generously shared their valuable insights to shape this guide. We are grateful for all of their support of the programme.

## **THE ROLE AND VALUE OF YOUTH PEER RESEARCH**

Peer research is a participatory method in which individuals with lived experience in the research area actively contribute to both directing and conducting the study. By drawing on their personal insights and deep understanding of the community, peer researchers help uncover more meaningful perspectives on specific topics (Yang and Dibb, 2020).

Evidence shows that peer research with young people improves the quality of research, practice, and services. Some commentators have noted that traditional research approaches have been Eurocentric and, in some cases, extractive, eroding the trust of young people from marginalised communities. Carrying out peer research with marginalised groups offers a different approach, fostering greater transparency and trust between young people and researchers. Involving young people in peer research not only helps them understand the research process but also provides insights into the diverse experiences of young people from communities that are often overlooked by traditional research methods.

Peer research expands young people's and researchers' perspectives and creates opportunities for personal growth and making a meaningful impact. It empowers young people, improves community access, and creates benefits from their lived experiences. Peer researchers bring a level of empathy, sensitivity, and understanding to the work that those without lived experience may lack. Additionally, it enhances the quality of data collected and develops valuable skills among young researchers. Peer research serves as part of young people's efforts to make their communities better (Yang and Dibb, 2020).



## **THE BENEFITS**

Youth peer research offers numerous benefits for young people who participate and for researchers, including:

- ⦿ Development of independent research skills, such as designing surveys and analysing data as well as building skills and increasing employability
- ⦿ Increased self-awareness which includes young people reflecting on their own biases and experiences, allowing for a well-rounded research process
- ⦿ Greater ability to break down stereotypes and build rapport among young people, specifically young people from racialised and marginalised communities. Some of these stereotypes include the assumption that young people from marginalised groups are not involved in research because they view it as boring or misconceptions about certain demographics based on media narratives
- ⦿ The valuing of young people's lived experience
- ⦿ Building of trust in communities which experience oppression and marginalisation
- ⦿ An improved understanding of shared cultural or faith practices as well as language, both in the words used and in the terms used to describe each other
- ⦿ A transparent research process that reduces tokenism and fosters genuine participation (Partnership for Young London, 2021)
- ⦿ Broader and more inclusive reach, engaging young people from similar age groups and ethnic backgrounds
- ⦿ Improved research design, data collection, analysis, and accessibility, with better identification of key themes that may be overlooked by traditional researchers
- ⦿ Attempts to redress power imbalances between researchers and communities, allowing for a deeper understanding of the research topic (Partnership for Young London, 2021; Kirby, 2004).

## **THE CHALLENGES**

Organisations should be mindful of several potential challenges in peer research, including:

- ⦿ Limited capacity and availability of young people due to education, work, or personal commitments
- ⦿ Short project timescales, as building relationships and trust with young people takes time
- ⦿ Engaging different age groups, particularly young children, which may require more time and effort
- ⦿ The potential of young people leaving their peer research roles as new opportunities arise
- ⦿ Confidentiality, safeguarding, and ethical concerns, especially when dealing with sensitive or potentially triggering topics
- ⦿ Limited time for training and skills development
- ⦿ Budget constraints
- ⦿ Inconsistent communication and participation from young people.

These challenges can be addressed through flexible planning, realistic timelines, and meaningful coproduction with young people (Partnership for Young London, 2021).

## RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE AS PEER RESEARCHERS

Young people from racialised and marginalised backgrounds can be encouraged to participate in peer research through various strategies, including:

- ⦿ **Recruitment through existing projects and initiatives** such as the Young Changemakers programme by UK Youth, The Diana Award, and Centre for Mental Health



"I've always kind of been interested in the research side... it's been good being able to collaborate with you [Centre for Mental Health] and get support in learning and understanding things about research... it's been exciting getting opportunities to write things... and run focus groups... and get that experience because those are skills I can take forward now."

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Recruiting young people who are involved in projects where their participation is supported by research.** Peer research provides young people with the ability to see how their work can be translated into action

- ⦿ **Providing clarity on how their contributions make a difference,** helping young people understand their role in the broader context of the project



"...understanding where they [young people] fit in the wider picture of the project – supportive and firm managers with clear vision, flexible working arrangements."

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Meeting young people where they are,** by connecting with them in their communities and in spaces where they spend time (in person and online). This could be different to where they live

- ⦿ **Raising awareness in creative ways,** such as videos on social media and posters/leaflets, using innovative strategies to promote opportunities and clearly communicating the benefits of participating



"It's mainly more finding ways to get the opportunities out there, to tell people it's there... more marketing [to young people]"

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Engaging individuals or groups through trusted leaders** and influential figures from underrepresented or marginalised communities.

## SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESEARCH

Researchers should consider several key factors when supporting young people in conducting research, including:

- ⦿ **Making research materials accessible and easy to understand,** ensuring young people can fully engage by using a variety of modalities such as videos and voice notes



"...things to do with research should be put in a position where children [and young people] understand it so they can genuinely engage with it."

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Providing clear information** about the research, including its goals, timelines, and manageable objectives



“Tell them the benefits and what they will get out of this [research] opportunity.”

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Recognising the unique needs of marginalised groups**, such as discrimination, housing and financial insecurity, and tailoring recruitment efforts to different communities. For example, collaborating with organisations that work specifically with young Black people to encourage participation
- ⦿ **Providing the young people with the physical and digital resources they need**, such as laptops, dictaphone, and internet access, to support their involvement in peer research as well as wellbeing resources and access to support
- ⦿ **Ensuring research tasks are accessible to all**, making adjustments so that young people with disabilities or other challenges, such as language barriers, can fully engage in the peer research process. This includes aiming to eliminate bias in research recruitment and practice, providing equal opportunities for growth, and using appropriate language. This also involves providing accessible and suitable locations for young people to carry out research and proposing convenient timelines for tasks
- ⦿ **Paying young people for their expertise and time** – for example, we paid all peer researchers on the Young Changemakers programme the London Living Wage for their work. It is important to consider or consult young people about different ways of compensating them for their time
- ⦿ **Balancing power dynamics**, ensuring that young people feel respected, valued, and empowered throughout the research process. This involves conducting regular check-ins with a trusted researcher to reflect on their experiences and addressing any concerns. It involves white researchers being upfront about white privilege and race-based power dynamics, as well as being open to being challenged, and non-defensive when peer researchers speak on important topics like race, culture, and racism
- ⦿ **Recognising the impact of the content and experiences of research on the wellbeing of young people**, ensuring safeguarding and supporting the wellbeing of peer researchers through debriefs and creating safe spaces for them to freely express their concerns
- ⦿ **Offering flexible working hours and hybrid working**, so that young people can balance their roles with education, employment, and personal responsibilities
- ⦿ **Providing young people with opportunities to build their skills**, not assuming that they will have all the skills needed when looking to be a prospective peer researcher.

## **DESIGNING AND DELIVERING RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Researchers can involve young people in various ways throughout the design and delivery of research projects, including:

- ⦿ **Co-designing research projects with young people** by assessing how realistic the aims of the research are, the feasibility of the research, and potential adjustments
- ⦿ **Making use of reflective journals** and having regular check-ins with supportive, open, and accessible managers
- ⦿ **Seeking young people’s input** on the research process and potential improvements, including aspects like focus group facilitation and thematic analysis of qualitative data
- ⦿ **Preparing easy-to digest data analysis** to make it more understandable and interpretable for young people.

## DISSEMINATING RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

To effectively engage young people in peer research, researchers should involve them not only in the research process but also in disseminating findings. This involves sharing the findings of the research with stakeholders and new audiences who can create change.

Key strategies for this include:

- ⦿ **Exploring diverse dissemination methods** beyond traditional reports and briefings, such as using storytelling, animations, performance and visual media



"...the art of storytelling... like animations and making research seem more like a story."

(Peer researcher from the Young Changemakers programme)

- ⦿ **Collaborating with young people to share research findings** within their networks and among their peers through social media such as TikTok
- ⦿ **Closing the feedback loop** by holding post-launch briefing sessions or discussion groups to update young people on the outcomes and impact of the research
- ⦿ **Presenting research findings** alongside young people to a wider audience, allowing young people to co-present findings with researchers
- ⦿ **Ensuring that the contributions of young people and the research process are shared**, highlighted, and advocated for with the same level of intensity as the findings of the research
- ⦿ **Celebrating young people's work** and development throughout the research process and ensuring a well-defined offboarding process, responding to and handling feedback in a sensitive manner
- ⦿ **Supporting young people in pursuing future opportunities**, including additional research roles, work placements, or educational pathways, and naming young people who have participated in the research in reports and related resources.

# TOP TIPS

## Here are ten tips to consider when involving young people in research:

- ⦿ Be clear about how the young people's personal data and demographics data will be processed and stored, with the choice to opt out and the right to be forgotten
- ⦿ Signpost to appropriate support and create communities for young people who are participating
- ⦿ Use clear, concise, and inclusive language in research
- ⦿ Be transparent and provide clarity about how and when the young people will be paid for their time, with the choice to opt out. This could include monetary payments or skills training
- ⦿ Ask young people about their research interests and help them build skills in the area
- ⦿ Provide a range of ways for young people to get involved in research
- ⦿ Be clear about how peer researchers will be supported; what actions to take regarding safety, harassment and threat; and how the content of research could impact mental health
- ⦿ Collaborate with peer researchers on goals, aims, and research methods
- ⦿ Provide inclusive, accessible, and equal research spaces for young people
- ⦿ Incorporate frequent one-to-one wellbeing check-ins with young people and have a nominated lead for wellbeing checks which will could be held by a researcher within the organisation.



## USEFUL RESOURCES ON PEER RESEARCH

### Challenging white privilege through peer research and coproduction

**This resource** explored the importance of peer researchers in shaping how data is collected to make it more culturally relevant and engaging for research participants, as well as helping to address power imbalances.

### A voice for change

For **this resource**, the young people were talked through a literature review process, analysed the papers and key themes, and worked on the recommendations with researchers.

### Other organisations which work with young people to make a change in mental health research:

#### 🕒 Leaders Unlocked

One of the aspects of Leaders Unlocked's work enables young people to play a leadership role in influencing strategic decisions, provision and research about young people's health and wellbeing. More information: <https://leaders-unlocked.org/>

#### 🕒 McPin Foundation

McPin Foundation has a mission to improve everyone's mental health through research informed and directed by expertise generated through lived experience. More information: <https://mcpin.org>

#### 🕒 NHS Youth forum

The NHS Youth Forum is made up of 25 young people from across the country. Members partner with policy leads at NHS England to deliver insights and recommendations on how to improve services for children and young people. The forum also gathers the views of other young people through surveys and discussion. More information: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/get-involved/get-involved/how/forums/nhs-youth-forum/>

#### 🕒 The Association for Young People's Health (AYPH)

The Association for Young People's Health works to understand and meet the particular health and wellbeing needs of 10-25 year olds. They deliver meaningful participation work with young people to centre their experiences and views on health. More information: <https://ayph.org.uk/>

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### **YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS A GUIDE TO PEER RESEARCH**

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