

Evaluation of Community Participatory Action Research Training & Mentoring: Cohort 2





Contents

Introduction

Survey results

- Collecting feedback
- Benefits of the programme
- What worked well
- What we could do better
- Rating skills and confidence
- Influence of research on local decisions
- Examples of good partnerships

Showcase event, June 2024

- Highlights
- Suggestions for improvements
- Data

Recommendations for cohort 3

Introduction

Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) is an approach in which community members take part in all parts of the research related to their communities as equal partners with system stakeholders, with the aim to put their research outcomes into action. This CPAR programme trained and mentored 30 Community Researchers from voluntary sector organisations across the South East. The findings of their research will be used to support key decision makers and commissioners at local and system levels in informing priorities and service development for marginalised communities in the South East. The training and mentoring was delivered by Scottish Community Development Centre, the University of Reading, and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research. This is an evaluation of the training & mentoring programme and the Showcase.

Survey results

Collecting feedback

An electronic survey was sent to all researchers at the midpoint and endpoint of the training. Feedback was gathered from a combination of multiple choice and free text answers.

The information was sought on:

- how beneficial the training & mentoring was to researchers
- what went well and what can be improved
- confidence and skills before and after training
- and their perceived influence of their research

16 researchers completed the midpoint survey and 18 (62%) completed the endpoint survey from 29 researchers who completed the programme. Improvements to engaging in feedback are outlined in our recommendations.

Benefits of the programme

The training delivered by the University of Reading and mentoring by Scottish Community Development Centre showed improvement in satisfaction between the midpoint and endpoint surveys. At the end of the training 75% said that the training was either extremely helpful or very helpful and 83% said the same for the mentoring. Resources offered were considered useful but accessing the Leads forum hub or the researcher's hub was no consistent and changes in NHSE access to SharePoint made this more challenging. There

were some who had not engaged in the researcher's hub or network and therefore were unable to comment.

What worked well

Researchers expressed they valued the support from the training providers, the format of delivery, and learning among their peers. Comments were overwhelmingly positive:

'The information and support. Getting together with other researchers and developing a network to work together in the future on collaborative projects.'

'I have really appreciated how communicative and supportive the team has been throughout the year with our research. It's been smooth sailing in terms of understanding our next steps each time with our mentors, touch base meetings, and so on.'

'Mentoring, meeting other researchers, funding to enable us to carry out research, opportunity to explore creative research practices, plus the team at Uni of Reading, SCDC and NHS Public Health were all fantastic passionate people who gave great support and encouragement – thank you!'

'The training and mentorship has been excellent and I always felt there was someone to ask if I had a query. I felt supported and encouraged from start to finish.'

What we could do better

A number of researchers commented that the first phase that the gap between the first training session and the first learning group was too long. There were individual suggestions to improve sharing meeting links in an easier format as well as reducing the delay of engaging the Institute for Voluntary Action Research. There were useful comments for the programme for example to share a 'who's who' document due to the volume of stakeholders emailing or attending training sessions which sometimes caused confusion.

Rating skills and confidence

There were strong indicators of increased skills in CPAR with an average out of 5 before/after = 2.7/4.3, and confidence 2.4/4.2 in the endpoint survey. It's also worth pointing out that the corresponding before/now figures for the midpoint evaluation were 3.1/3.6 for skills and 3.0/3.9 for confidence. It is unclear if these results in both surveys are from the same people but shows a consistent increase in the researcher's perceived improvement.

Influence of research on local decisions

In the mid-programme evaluation, no researchers said they felt they had a 'great deal' or 'a lot' of influence over local decisions and services in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. 37.5% said they had 'a moderate amount', 25% said 'a little', 25% said 'none at all' and 12.5% said they 'don't know'. In the final evaluation, no researcher said they had a 'great deal' of influence but 16.67% said 'a lot', 11.11% said 'a moderate amount', 61.11% said 'a little', 5.56% said 'none at all' and 5.56% said 'don't know'.

The change in influence appears both positive and possibly a realistic understanding of this last task. It is important to point out that the survey was completed before IVAR delivered workshops on how to articulate their research actions with policy and local decision makers.

Researchers were asked if their research was already having an impact. In the mid-programme evaluation, 18.75% strongly agreed and 43.75% agreed their research is already having an impact, and at the endpoint it was 11.11% and 55.56%

The topic of influence and impact is best reflected from the free text responses:

'Our research shows that major change needs to take place regarding the attitudes of policy makers to the inequalities poorer communities face. This will involve a philosophical shift in thinking and policy'

'We haven't really started talking to the people that can make changes'

'Our research is yet to have an impact as my group have been trying to gain interest from local council and other service providers. Our research report has been circulated, but we're now trying to get some feedback.'

'I am already in discussions with local people about a project that may be of benefit to the community.'

'I hope that the co-developed research that we have completed has the impact that we hope for, in relation to raising community voices and sharing this with relevant stakeholders who have the power for the change that is needed. The research is already making an impact ever since the start as the questions that were asked were influenced by the community's needs and demand for further improvements. They have verbally stated their appreciation for ensuring that their challenges are being shared'

'We did have an impact, just by doing research we had smaller actions occurring during the project but due to no further funding for this work we aren't able to work

on actions as much as we hoped and feel it's the classic, do research then it stops and nothing comes of it scenario playing out. Longer term funding and legacy planning are crucial.'

'You guys rock, and you've been a great source for confidence building. You have the ability to help participants realise the skills they already have.'

'Although have given suggestions on improvements, it was a great experience, and I am fired up to become a more effective influencer and continue with research. Funding is always an issue. Thank you for the opportunity'

Examples of good partnerships

Portsmouth City Council took on the role of recruitment of the Portsmouth Hope and Homestart researchers. As small organisations they were not able to manage the reimbursement to the researchers. Hope and Homestart indicated that it was the only way they could be involved.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire worked in equal partnership with Oxford Community Action acting as host lead, creating links and networks with local authority stakeholders and managing the reimbursement to researchers. Oxford Community Action was successful in their application for cohort 3 and are doing this independently having learned from this partnership.

Showcase event, June 2024


The Showcase gave an opportunity for Community Researchers to promote the insights from their research projects and share the learning from the implementation of the projects. The event was attended by over 100 delegates and included a combination of oral and visual presentations, a marketplace, networking and a celebration of the Community Researcher's achievements. The showcase was held in Coin Street Community Builders, London. An electronic survey was shared by email and by QR code in the lobby, and completed by 36 attendees.

Comments were overwhelmingly positive and there was a sense that the day was full of energy and a rewarding finale to the researchers' learning journey

Some suggested the event should have been held on the one floor and they would have like to have heard all the presentations of their peers.

Highlights

- Hearing from Professor Kevin Fenton's plenary
- The choir

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- Research Highlights in 2 minutes
 - Listening to peer researchers' presentations, and the similarities in their findings
 - Sharing their work with a wide audience
 - Receiving certificates
 - Networking

Suggestions for improvements

- For researchers to be able to hear their peers present
- the event should have been held on the one floor
- more time for Q&A

Quotes

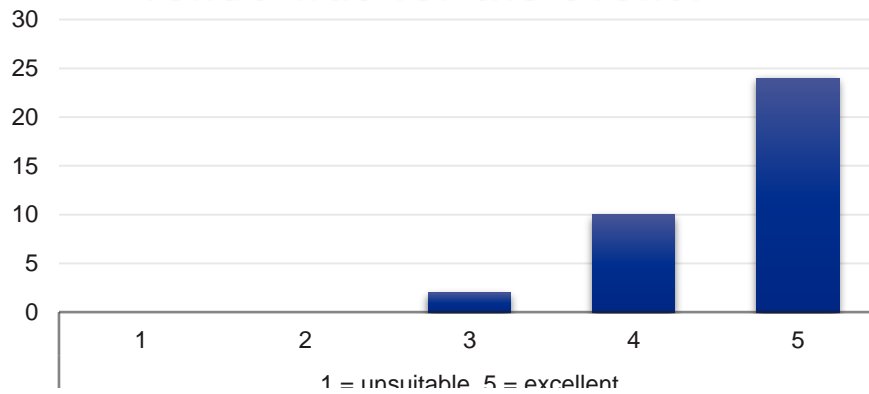
'This is how all events should be run'

'My highlight of the day was discovering so many committed, caring people working towards to same end goal and trying their best to make a positive difference in the lives of so many others.'

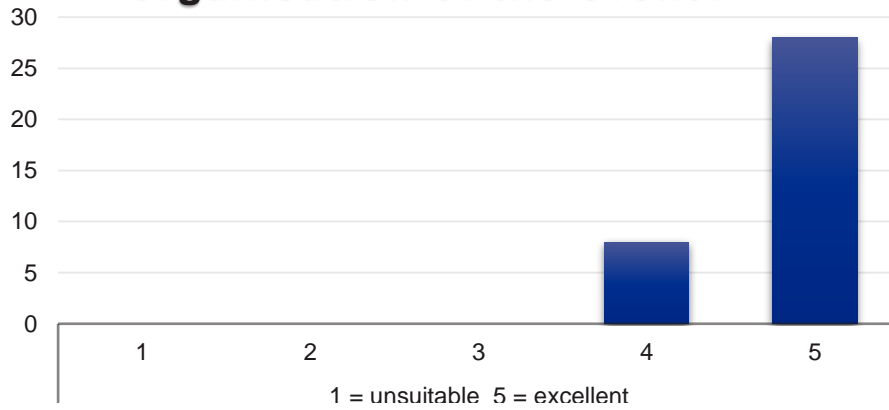
'We really enjoyed the day and have come away with great ideas for adding value to the work that we do as well as contacts to be in touch with from the day.'



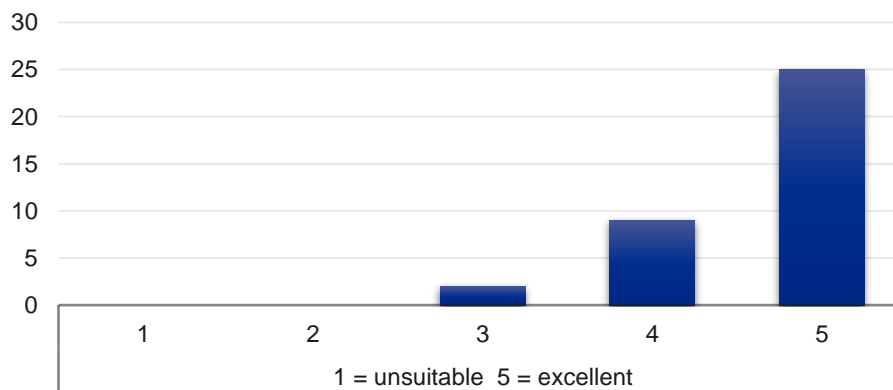
How suitable do you think the venue was for the event?



How would you rate the organisation of the event?



Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?





Recommendations for Cohort 3

As cohort 3 has been launched some of the recommendations below have been put in place

1. improvement participation in evaluation surveys

Midpoint and endpoint surveys will be shared during training or mentoring sessions where researchers will be given 10 minutes during their session to complete. Improving response rate to the showcase will be explored later in the year.

2. A training programme without a long summer recess so researchers can get straight to work

We have worked with our delivery partners to develop a timetable fitting the academic year starting early October 2024 and completing in September 2025