

The impact of Public and Community Engagement and Involvement in our research



Background

At the Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) we aim to create a sense of ownership and greater equity among local communities by placing public voices at the heart of all our research activities. All our projects involve working in partnership with local people, to design research that meets needs, while also improving the quality and impact of the research findings.

One local resident involved in the ARC KSS is Eleanor. As a Public Advisor, Eleanor offers her personal, professional, and lived experience from a public perspective to many areas of our work. One example is her involvement as a public representative on the ARC KSS Academy's Organisational and Research CApacity (ORCA) group. This group combines experience, examples of excellence and best practise to support and guide the ARC KSS Academy as they aim to develop and nurture new health and care researchers in the region. Activities include: offering input and oversight for the Academy, taking part in away days where future plans are co-developed and designed.

We asked Eleanor what she gained from being involved with ORCA, a project she felt connected both to her lived experience and professional life. Eleanor identified the positive impact of her involvement on her own sense of achievement and satisfaction:

"I was involved in the recruitment panels that selected a researcher for an Individual Development Award and then participated with her during the year, culminating in the ORCA awayday the next year, where she presented some of her work and received positive feedback. Being involved in the cycle from start to completion, like my involvements with various research projects, was so rewarding and satisfying, with a tangible outcome."

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“What is great about it [ORCA], is it sets out with the idea of inclusion. I was fortunate enough last summer to conduct an activity for the research week, which was about reflective practice. And I met the people involved in the ARC mentoring and I am now going to do some mentoring training which fits with many other things in my life. I don't know if you can get any idea of how satisfying it is to be involved with something, and then see the fruit of it.”

Eleanor is passionate about inclusion and creating local health and social services which reduce health inequalities. Through her involvement in the ARC KSS, Eleanor feels she can help develop more inclusive and supportive local services. Eleanor adds:

“It is hugely important to me personally that my input has been valued and the impact it has had. Working with ARC KSS adds purpose and meaning to the other work I do nationally and regionally, as well as in the county where I live - all the work I do on mental health, equality and inclusion. It has motivated me to get more training and to train as a peer supervisor and peer researcher. These activities enhance my sense that my lived experience has meaning and value. That has had impact on developments in other projects such as Changing Futures and inspired others.”

Eleanor also believes her active involvement with the ARC KSS has helped build her confidence and improve her quality of life:

“There has been a beneficial impact from doing meaningful work. It has given me confidence to go out there and apply for things myself. If another organisation wants some public engagement, I now put myself forward. And that has produced effective work and improved the quality of my life.”

The ARC KSS values Eleanor and all the other members of the public who help shape our research agenda and work with us to develop high quality, relevant and useable research evidence.