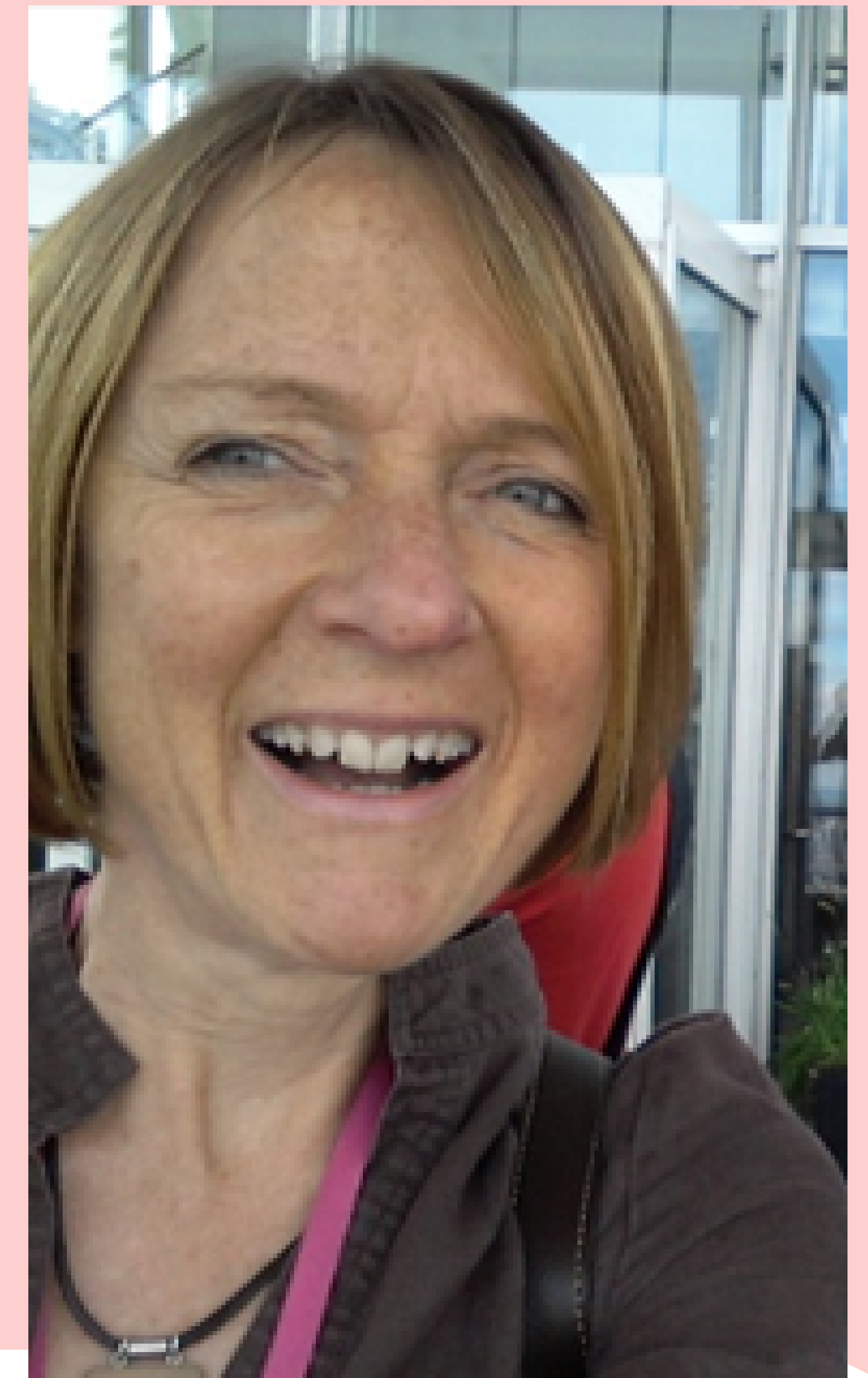


Being part of 'the team' can make all the difference - insights from a public co-applicant.



Background

Sarah Giles' work in public involvement is well established. She is currently a Public Advisor for the Digital Innovation Theme at the Applied Research Collaboration (ARC KSS), a lay research advisor for the Kent Research Partnership, as well as a member of the LEAP (Lived Experience Advisory Panel) for the Alzheimer's Society. Her work at the ARC KSS includes being a public co-applicant where, as well as being involved in the development of funding applications, she has also been a significant member of the research team.

Through this work, Sarah has discovered what helps make a public member's involvement in a research project an enjoyable and positive experience, both personally and for the project outcomes. Below she shares her insights

Being involved – The Highs

- All co-applicants were involved from the start, kept up to date at each stage and thanked.
- I always had an agenda sent prior to each team's meeting, with action points and responsibilities clearly defined.
- I was offered training, and this was carried through.
- Being a part of focus groups and creative workshops made me feel part of a team. I ran a breakout room, which enhanced inclusion and felt worthwhile. The creative workshop was fun and made a difference to how the research was experienced and understood by participants.
- My other commitments were taken into consideration and worked around, so I felt appreciated.

Missing out - The Lows

- Given short notice on request to be involved in the research, therefore unsure of what had been discussed before.
- When commitments clashed, this meant missing events and so missed feeling part of a team.
- Making sure documents can be viewed by all, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) co-applicants will not have access to university drives and may have problems using SharePoint. Make sure actions are on agenda prior to meetings on Teams.

Take aways

- Remember, having a co-applicant with lived experience enriches the research outcome.
- Research is teamwork, include co-applicants as often and as early as possible.
- Co-applicants give the researcher, knowledge of real-life experiences which means the products/services truly meet the community needs.
- It's important to remember that co-applicants have busy lives but have a strong desire to make a difference too.
- Co-applicants will give you critical and positive feedback, helping to improve the research outcome.
- Always make sure the co-applicant is updated on any piece of research within the project they are not directly involved in. Helping to be kept in the loop.
- Co-applicants should feel the research is a worthwhile and an enjoyable experience.

Sarah's over-riding message was it was not only important for the research for her to feel included in the team, but this was what made it feel worthwhile.

In her words:

“Teamwork is dreamwork”