

In Our Own Words: Surrey young people's peer-led research programme



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The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) funded three organisations that provide support for young people - up to the age of 25 - to engage in, get involved with, co-produce and co-design health and care research in relation to children and young people's mental health.

These Youth Research Partnerships include a range of research projects from a host of different organisations working together to improve the way children and young people's mental health services are delivered and run, across Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Project summary

In Our Own Words is a pilot project aimed at empowering neurodivergent young people in Surrey to become researchers and explore their own experiences and those of their peers regarding mental health and wellbeing. This initiative was a collaborative effort involving various organisations across Surrey, such as [Mindworks Surrey](#), [Surrey Youth Voice](#) and [Healthwatch Surrey](#).

The project trained 11 neurodivergent young people, aged 12-22, in social research methods. These youth researchers led their own research projects, focusing on areas of mental health and wellbeing that were important to them. The goal was to give these young people a platform to share their experiences, generate new knowledge, and create solutions to the challenges they face. The project also aimed to support young people's teamwork and communication skills, grow their confidence, and create a space for social connection and community.

What did the project involve?

The young researchers received training in social research methods from professional researchers at the University of Surrey's Department of Sociology. The training covered various aspects of research, including generating hypotheses, forming research questions, understanding research methods, ethics, data gathering, analysis, and presentation.

After their training, the youth researchers designed and led their own independent research projects. They developed surveys to understand the experiences of neurodivergent young people in various settings, including perspectives from young people, parents, carers, educators, and police staff. The data collected was then analysed to formulate recommendations for improving services and support for the neurodivergent community.

The project encouraged creativity and individuality. Youth researchers created comic stories to represent their research journeys and participated in a graffiti workshop to highlight key messages. A public speaking workshop helped build their confidence and prepared them for presenting their findings.

Dissemination

The findings and recommendations were shared with decision-makers, senior leaders, boards, and organisations for mental health improvement in Surrey. A special exhibition at the University of Surrey showcased the youth-led research, celebrating the achievements of the youth researchers, inspiring collaboration and important conversations.

The project aimed to continue sharing the learnings and recommendations to influence positive change in mental health support and services for neurodivergent young people across Surrey. The youth researchers are determined to keep advocating for their findings and recommendations.

By involving neurodivergent young people as lived experience experts, the **In Our Own Words** project ensured that the research was relevant and accurately represented the community's needs and experiences, leading to more effective and meaningful recommendations for positive change.

To find out more about the *In Our Own Words* project [click here](#).

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