



Les Gunbie, a public member at the Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) tells us about himself and his role at the ARC.



Name: Les Gunbie

Occupation: Primary school worker / Educator for Sustainability

Age: 55

What region do you live in (Kent, Surrey or Sussex)? Sussex

Tell us a little bit about yourself

I am a dad to 22 year old twins, a carer for my mum and most recently have worked in state education. My partner and I live in Brighton, and were both originally aid workers in south India, and East Africa respectively. We have retained involvement in community work in different ways. For the past 16 years I have been a Learning Mentor in a state primary school, helping to support young children and their families to get the best out of their time in school. I love reading, swimming and being outdoors with a local forest school.

How would you describe yourself?

I have been involved for many years in my home area helping to run a local sustainability group, and believe strongly in the power of community to address the many societal issues we face today. I like the idea of experience sharing between generations, and between people from different backgrounds. I am interested in how organisations work, and what is going on in other people's lives. I enjoy thinking about problems and contributing ideas to address them.

What inspired you join ARC KSS as a public member? What interests you about this role?

I saw the opportunity to take part in ongoing research about different aspects of health and social care and decided to find out more. There is a support process to tell you about what is involved and then, once signed up, I received emails about different studies.



If there is a study that I feel I have some experience to contribute towards, I will respond with my reasons for wanting to get involved. So far, I've always been picked for the studies I have applied for. Then it is about using my lived experience to help influence how the study is shaped and develops. That feels quite satisfying. It helps that the contribution is acknowledged with a small payment as well.

How long have you been a public member? Since May 2022.

Tell us about how your role?

The role really starts when you have been accepted to take part in a particular study. You might be sent documents to read in advance, and you will almost certainly take part in some online meetings to share information and ideas. It's important to think through what you want to contribute, and to make sure that you leave space for others to have their say. If there is any follow-up requested, I try to do it in good time to make it useful. Ideally, the study leaders will feedback to you afterwards, when it has delivered results.

What does the term 'public and community involvement and engagement' mean to you?

Public and community involvement and engagement for me is about bringing a lived experience dimension to academic research, and ensuring that there is a bit of a reality check in the whole research process. Also bringing awareness of community action that researchers may not know about.

What skills and knowledge have you developed during your time as a public member?

I've learned about some really interesting projects and about the interaction between NHS, university researchers and other groups. I've received 'mental health' support through a "Well at Work" study, and also in my role as an unpaid carer. I have been asked to facilitate meetings as well, which has added to the experience and the feeling of being part of a team. And, of course, listening to others' experiences in the various studies that I have taken part in is always helpful, to learn from how they have gone about dealing with similar situations.

Could you give us an example of a project that you were involved in that you are particularly proud of?

I have been involved with the Conversations about Living and Dying study which looks at how older people living with complex needs are assessed, or are involved in their assessments, as they near the last few years of life. This enabled me to use my experience of looking after my dad before he died, to bring a more holistic perspective to the design process. We were able to talk about the importance of taking a more celebratory approach to someone's life rather than just a clinical perspective. And also to raise the importance of family dynamics, and the helpfulness of reframing the older person's perception of maybe "being a burden" into "helping the family to know what they really want".