



Alys Mathers, an Applied Research Collaboration, Kent Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) Springboard Awardee and Highly Specialist Speech Language Therapist at East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust talks about her research journey as part of this year's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) #YourPathinResearch campaign.

Research Project: Working together in mainstream primary schools: a scoping review of the roles and relationships of Speech and Language Therapists and teaching staff.



When did you first get involved in research?

I first discovered I could be involved in carrying out research in my day-to-day NHS work through a service evaluation. Our team had been approached by a local university, so I offered to be the NHS lead. I then moved jobs and, through my NHS trust, did the NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic (ICA) Internship, and started developing my own research ideas.

Why did you decide to get involved in research?

I got involved in research so that I was able to show that our services were working and it was exciting to be creating the evidence. The job satisfaction at the end of the clinical day is much greater when you know what you've done has been effective.

What has been the highlight of your research career so far?

Being granted the Springboard Award by the Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex to carry out a scoping review on my research topic spurred me on, if I am able to publish this in an academic journal that will be a highlight. Speaking at conferences, and knowing my small-scale research was well received by the audience, was also really encouraging.

Why do you believe research is important?

I think it is really important to question clinical practice. Within the field of Speech and Language therapy, there are plenty of unanswered questions and interventions in use that have not been fully evaluated. With robust research, we can show what works and improve services.

What do you love about your job?

As a Speech and Language Therapist, my day to day job is to support children and young people's communication skills. I enjoy enabling children and young people to communicate more effectively with peers, family, and teaching staff, to socialise and access education. I love seeing the progress made by the children and young people we support.

Would you recommend research as a career to others?

I would definitely recommend that clinicians engage in research, alongside their day-to-day work. It means that any research they undertake will be focused on the most important questions or challenges faced by the people they support, their families and clinicians. It also supports the implementation of research in clinical practice.

What are your plans and ambitions for the future?

I will be applying for the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Pre-Clinical Academic Fellowship in the next funding round. My research aspiration is to be a practicing clinical academic, combining both, so my clinical practice will inspire my research and vice versa.

