An A-Z of Inclusive Research

A whistle-stop tour of 26 things to consider when designing inclusive research in children's social care

This guide was developed by InCLUDE, a coproduced project exploring the barriers and facilitators to inclusive research in foster and kinship care research. It reflects our learning from multiple sources including a national survey, literature reviews, seven focus groups with underserved communities in fostering research, meetings with fostering/kinship organisations, and personal reflections from the InCLUDE team. It is intended as a checkpoint for researchers to consider their inclusivity. t is a starting point, rather than an exhaustive list.

Accessibility

Research activities need to be in accessible locations and at times which accommodate people who work or have children. Venues and locations need to be accessible for different communities. Food is great way to bring people together, so ensure options cater for everyone. Activities and materials should be engaging and easy to read, with video options available.

Build Relationships

Building rapport between researcher and participants, and within research teams, helps create an environment where authenticity and honesty can thrive. Relationships takes time and effort, and need sustaining. Charities and community groups are a good way to bridge the gap between researchers and participants.

Coproduction

The best way to build in inclusivity is to coproduce research projects from start to finish, collaborating with people with lived experience. Coproduction means everyone having an equal voice in decision making and directing research, regardless of where their knowledge comes from.

Debrief

Involvement in research can be emotive and difficult, especially if we ask people to share personal stories with people they don't know. It's important to offer debriefing space and remind people about this before, during and after participation. If you can't offer this yourself, then please connect with other organisations who can.

Empowerment

Minoritised communities can often feel disempowered to take part in research. Empowering people can involve explicitly asking for their unique views, reminding them that their voice is important to you, and showing them the impact of their involvement. In group settings, people can feel more empowered if they are within their own community.

Finding Out

Researchers can't assume who is being underserved in their research — we need to find out! Look at national and local population data and compare with participant demographics. Take time to find out about the needs of communities who are often underserved before a study starts, so that you can anticipate how to meet these needs

Grassroots

Connect with grassroots organisations who are already connected to and trusted by communities (charities, religious groups, community support groups etc.). They can support recruitment and dissemination, especially if you are trying to connect with typically underserved communities.

Humility

No one has all the answers when it comes to humility. We need to be humble, asking questions and seeking advice form others, and be willing to change our approaches as we learn.

Identity

Some people feel more comfortable to engage with researchers who share aspects of their identity or experiences. This isn't always possible, so including experts-by-lived-experience within research also brings new identities into the research perspective.

Juggling Life

Taking part in research is rarely a priority for participants. Where possible, be flexible about how and when people can participate. Notifications of upcoming activities and regular reminders can also help keep research activities on people's radars, when they are juggling lots of other commitments.

Keep Connected

There are lots of fantastic researchers and resources when it comes to inclusivity. Stay connected to what others are working on, look out for networks, and ask others for help and advice. Research is better when we can learn from each others' strengths, and mistakes.

Language

English proficiency is a common barrier to participation in research. Even when people have appropriate English skills, research jargon can make research both inaccessible and unappealing. Short-text information sheets, and video options, can be helpful, and it's best to ask non-academics to design or proof-read materials.

Motivations

Everyone has different motivations for taking part in research; these often centre around a personal connection to the subject or wanting to make a difference or impact to your community. Understanding these motivations (e.g. through asking community members) and speaking directly to these in promotional materials, for example through questions, can be helpful for successful recruitment.

Neat and Tidy

Inclusive research is not neat and tidy! It requires flexibility and openness from researchers - good inclusive research is iterative and adaptive to the needs of a given community at a given time.

Opportunities

One of the most common reasons for not participating in research is not knowing about opportunities. Research adverts need to be where people will see them. Utilising social media, radio and podcasts can help promote research opportunities, but people are most likely to connect with opportunities when they hear about them through word of mouth or in spaces they trust.

Pictures

A picture says a thousand words. Pictures must reflect the people you want to notice them, so materials should include diverse imagery (e.g. different ages, genders and ethnicities). They must be relevant and clear. Recruitment materials are best when picture heavy and word light.

Questions

Give people the opportunity to ask questions, then answer them honestly. Think about how you will invite questions, including from those who lack confidence or trust, e.g. having a written option. Questions are welcome throughout the research experience, in group and individual settings.

Reflexivity

Research is only as inclusive as its researchers. We must take a step back and look at how our own values and assumptions affect our research, how our identities create power dynamics that perhaps aren't immediately obvious, and what steps we can take to change these. Reflexivity is a continual process.

Safe Spaces

Create safe spaces for participation. This will look different for each activity, but some suggestions include: setting up "conduct agreements" at the start of research, and reminding people about confidentiality each time you meet. Some people feel more comfortable in groups with people like them, and others feel better in mixed groups — give people the choice where possible.

Trust

Mistrust is a big barrier to research. People might not trust the study, the methods or the researcher. They can be concerned about how you will use what they say or if you are using them for personal/career gain. Trust takes time to build — we can't assume trust, but must try to earn it through transparency and humility.

Updates

There are often long gaps between participation, dissemination and seeing impact. Researchers can be inclusive throughout the research lifespan with updates ("we are now revisiting what you said", "we are now sharing it", etc.).

X

The cross represents the multiplicity of identities we all have. All these identities intersect, meaning that people don't fit into neat categories. When looking at inclusion, we need to be mindful of the diversity of voices and experiences within communities and make space to hear these. And it's not fair to expect one person to be a representative or spokesperson for their whole community.

Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth is one of the most effective methods of recruitment: people are more likely to trust, and join, research recommended to them by someone they know. It can also help reach underserved or marginalised communities. And sharing information about trials with others can help current participants feel like they are giving something back to the research process.

Value

People are more likely to take part in research when they feel valued. Say thank you, show them the importance and impact of their involvement, remind them that as an individual they have made a difference.

You

Inclusive research needs you! This is everyone's responsibility, not just the role of a consultant or participation expert.

Zoom

Online research can save time, money for travelling, bring people from diverse locations together, and allow people who can't travel to participate. Captioning and language features can also help those who struggle with spoken English. However, it can exclude those without technology skills/confidence, or without internet access. It's best to give people options to meet online, via phone or in person, as they prefer.

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