



**The
10 for 10
Project**

Celebrating 10 Years
of McPin



Working as a co-researcher

Shaping young people's mental health research

Foreword

Welcome to our resource, *Working as a co-researcher: Shaping young people's mental health research*. This is one of ten resources we've produced to celebrate ten years of the McPin Foundation.

For those new to us, we are a small mental health research charity that has been delivering on our mission to *transform mental health research* by placing lived experience at the center of research since April 2013. In this time, we have changed and grown from a six-person team to a network of staff, collaborators and partners covering the UK, with friends across the globe.

To mark our anniversary we have produced a collection of ten resources that explain our approach to working in collaboration with lived experience expertise to lead and shape research, evaluations and public involvement work.

The '10 for 10' resources showcase our learning and reflections from working across a wide range of projects. They are not 'how to' guides but instead present our thinking and learning to date. Two years in the making, this collection has encouraged us to navigate differences of opinion, even amongst co-authors. We value the conversations this process sparked, and we believe the results are a collection of resources with more depth and nuance.

Now that we've published these resources, we'd like to continue that conversation. We don't have all the answers. At McPin, we are continuing to develop our expertise in coproduction, public involvement in research, peer research and supporting lived experience roles in the workplace. By sharing how we approach these issues and what we have learnt over the decade we hope the resources spark passionate conversations amongst the wider mental health research community, and beyond.

We do hope you find this resource on working with co-researchers, and other resources in the series useful, and we welcome feedback.

Turning to this resource, *Working as a co-researcher: Shaping young people's mental health research*, specifically we explore what we mean by co-research and look at examples of it in action at McPin. We have also shared our seven building blocks for meaningful involvement with co-researchers.



Vanessa Pinfold

Co-founder and research director

The resources in our 10 for 10 collection are:

1. Using lived experience in the workplace: How staff lived experiences are shaping work at McPin
2. Coproduction at McPin: Reflections and learning over 10 years
3. Peer Research at McPin: Our approach, reflections and learning over 10 years
4. Public Involvement in mental health research at McPin: Reflections and learning over 10 years
5. Research Involvement Groups: McPin's models and learning, and linked resource on 'recruiting for diversity'
6. Working as a co-researcher at McPin: Shaping young people's mental health research
7. Young People meeting guide
8. Wellbeing at work: What does it mean at McPin? and linked resources: Mentors and mentees (podcast); Neurodivergent meeting guide: A McPin lived experience perspective
9. McPin's journey towards antiracism
10. An Ode to Peer Research at McPin: You got the Power!: Dedicated to those who have crafted their pain into power (video)

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the co-researchers who have worked with us both on projects and shaping this resource as well as project partners. Thank you for trusting us to collaborate and learn how to deliver co-research together. We would specifically like to thank staff at McPin who have commented on this resource, and the co-researchers who wrote sections and fed in ideas. Raj Hazzard, Senior Researcher at McPin, has co-ordinated the production of all 10 resources in our series, whom we owe a particular thanks to for the care and kindness brought to this project.

Illustrator and visual storyteller Kremena Dimitrova and Raj Hazzard collaborated to create two visual metaphors that captured the essence of McPin's work. Bridge between Worlds speaks to McPin's commitment to connect the knowledge, experience and expertise from a variety of differing and overlapping communities and spaces. Valuing Vulnerability speaks to McPin's commitment to nurture and empower the knowledge and skills embedded in mental health experiences. Design work is by Mark Teagles at White Halo.

Introduction

At McPin, we've been working with young people as co-researchers since 2020. We have found it invaluable. In this resource we share our model of co-research, and our journey, in the hope that we can learn with others and continue to evolve this way of working.

Through conversations with co-researchers and academic researchers who have worked together, we have identified six key themes that cover the essential building blocks needed to create meaningful co-researcher involvement in mental health research: equity; diversity; collaborative project planning and design; 'beyond tokenism lies reciprocity'; inclusive working practices; and honesty.

The case studies included in this resource are derived from projects at McPin that have involved co-researchers. They illustrate how we have developed co-research and created positive outcomes for both the project and the co-researchers themselves.

What is co-research?

At McPin we use the term co-researcher for a young person aged 16–25 who is working in a trainee researcher capacity on a youth-focused project adopting a co-research approach. They will often also have relevant mental health lived experience of the topic being researched.

We chose this term to emphasise the co-working relationship between young people and academics. Involving young people makes a research project focused on youth mental health more relatable, leading to more relevant results. Working in this way we can address generational differences that can otherwise create barriers and problems for study teams.



Everyone has different skills and interests that they can bring to the work alongside their lived experience, so it is important to see those with lived experience as assets to utilise and help with the work rather than a tick-box or final stamp of approval.”

McPin staff member



Co-research brings the same benefits of interdisciplinarity research – different perspectives, skills and experience.”

McPin staff member

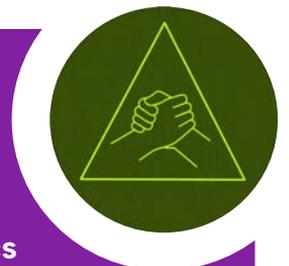
At McPin, there are some fundamental features to co-research and working as a co-researcher:

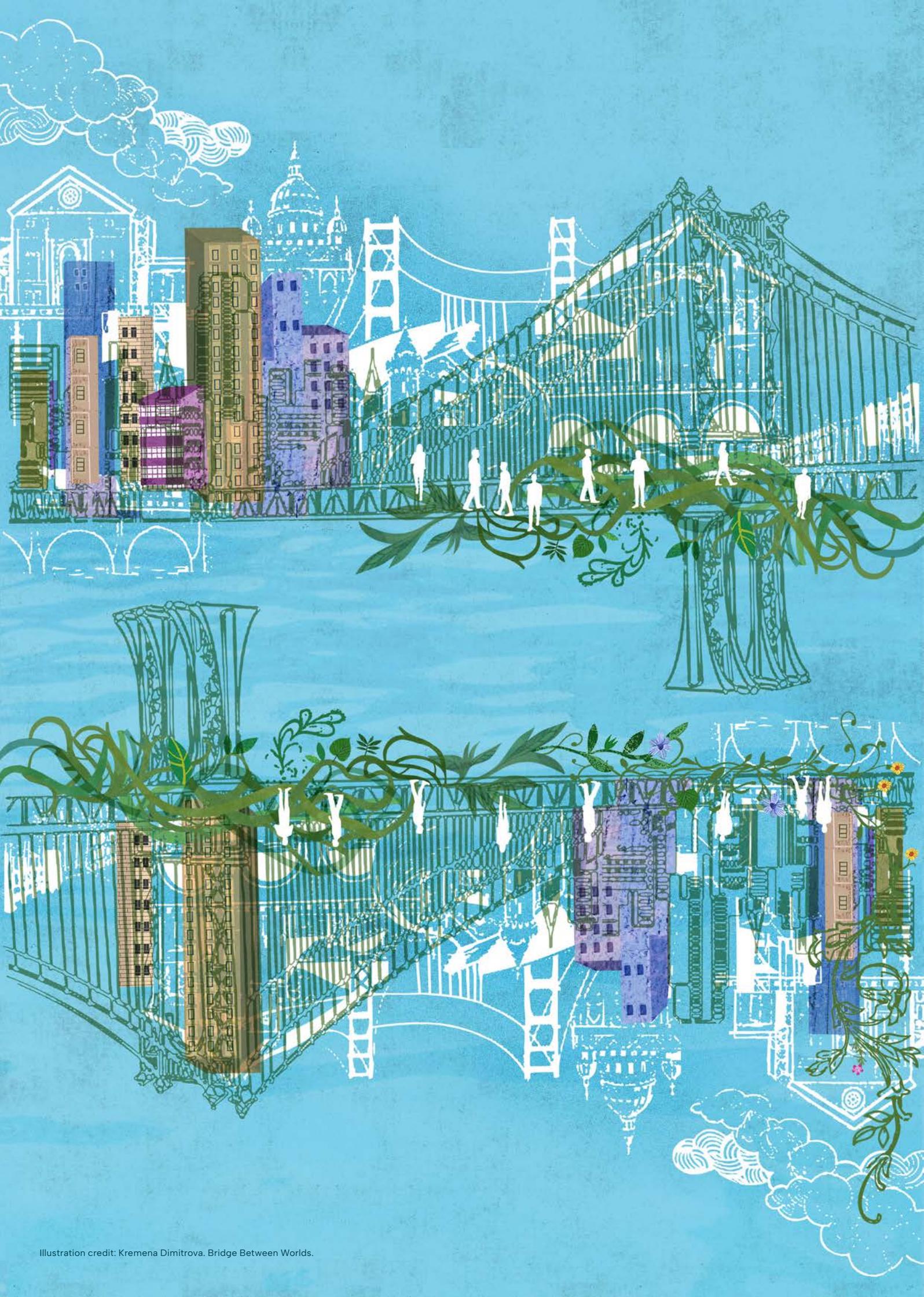
5 fundamentals of co-research at McPin

- 👁️ The research is young people focused
- 👁️ The role requires people to work a small number of ad-hoc hours
- 👁️ The aim is to upskill; providing training and support which could lead to a more substantive work position
- 👁️ The term “co” originates from a core principle of equity in the relationship such as between university-employed researcher and McPin co-researcher
- 👁️ Projects work with people over a substantial period (over 12 months)

5 fundamental characteristics of co-researchers at McPin

- 👁️ Aged 16–25 years
- 👁️ Experience of mental health issues or strong interest in mental health
- 👁️ New to research collection with strong commitment to developing skills as a researcher
- 👁️ Able to work flexible hours over a period of time, and a commitment to working for at least 12 months (sometimes longer)
- 👁️ An interest in the collection of research data, providing advice, attending planning meetings and contributing to dissemination activities



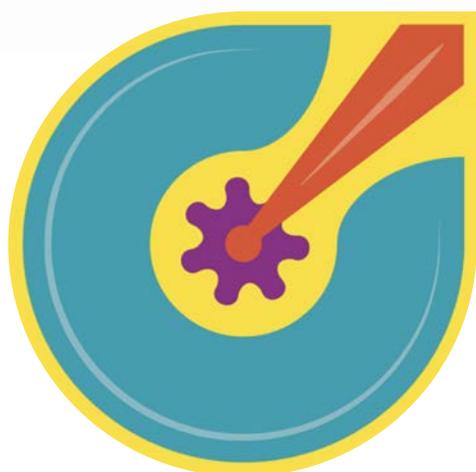


Examples of co-research at McPin (2020–2022)

Blueprint

The project was focused on improving mental health services available to children and young people funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR). This was where we first started to develop our co-research approach. Six young people co-researchers were recruited. They were trained and supported by an academic team and McPin staff.

The co-researchers were all studying at university when they began this work. We co-authored a journal article about our experiences ([see here](#)), which included data collection and presentation of results at conferences.



CoRAY

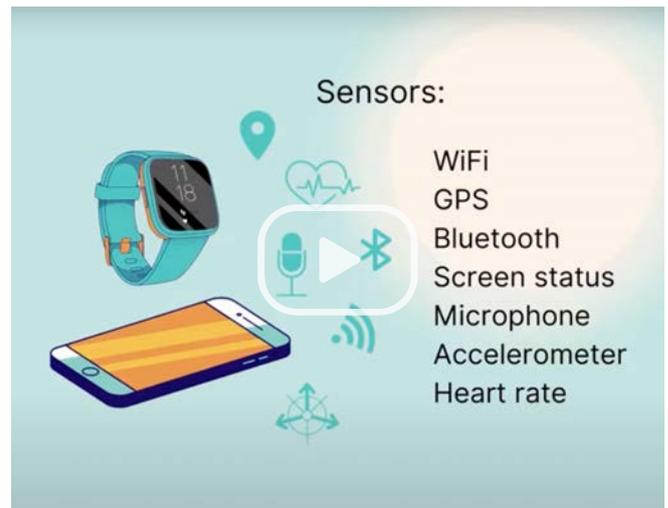
CoRAY

The Blueprint team was invited to transition onto the CoRAY study for additional experience and the opportunity to work with a different academic team. The project explored young people's experiences of being involved in mental health research as part of a larger piece of work led by the University of Oxford funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Five co-researchers joined this project. They assisted with 13 interviews, as well as thematic analysis, write up and dissemination activities, including presenting at conferences ([see here](#)).

Remote measurement technologies for depression in young people

This project involved undertaking a realist review alongside the project lead based at Kings College London funded by the Wellcome Trust (Active Ingredients programme). Two co-researchers working on the project assisted with the review and the write up of a journal article. The co-researchers for this work were recruited from the McPin Young Person's Advisory Group.



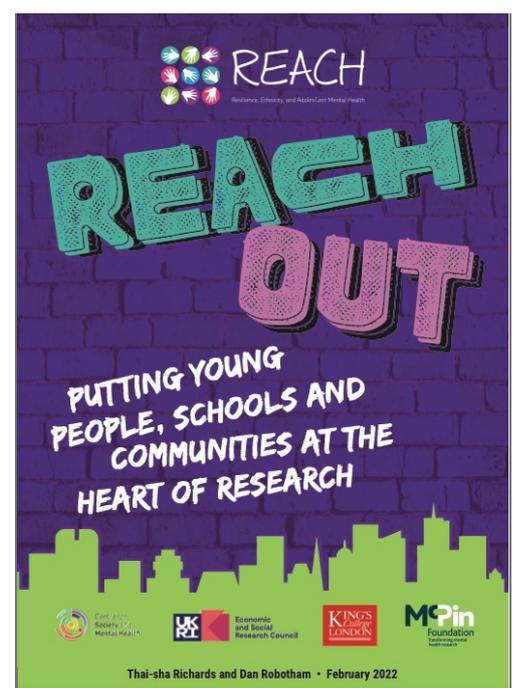
Universal School Interventions

The project's focus was improving the mental health of young LGBTQ+ people funded by the Wellcome Trust (Active Ingredients programme). There was one co-researcher involved in this project who assisted researchers at University College London with a literature review and dissemination outputs.

REACH

The REACH project explored risk and resilience factors among secondary school-aged children in London regarding mental health, originally funded by the European Union. Our co-research came at the end of the project, producing a learning guide on how the team at Kings College London involved young people in the project with us. One 17-year-old co-researcher, still in school, worked on the project.

They worked with a McPin staff member to co-interview stakeholders for a podcast and created a resource for the study covering how to involve young people in research based in secondary schools. The co-researcher has since been on interview panels to appoint staff and PhD students, and has spoken at conferences. The work on the resource involved interviewing, analysis and editing drafts of the final report ([see here](#)).





Building blocks for meaningful involvement of co-researchers

After speaking with co-researchers and people who had worked with them during their research projects, we found six key themes that represent the building blocks of how McPin involves young people as co-researchers in research. These six themes are:

- Equity
- Diversity
- Collaborative project planning and design
- Beyond tokenism lies reciprocity
- Inclusive working practices
- Honesty



Equity

Equity lies at the heart of co-research. Equity understands that not everyone working on a project starts from the same position. It adjusts ways of working so people can meaningfully contribute. McPin often works in research environments that involve partnerships between people and/or groups that are hierarchical. The work can involve both senior and junior staff who have varying levels of knowledge, skills, resources and responsibility, particularly when it comes to making key decisions. One could say power is distributed unevenly in most research environments. Equity recognises and addresses this imbalance, injecting more fairness within the working system.

Co-researchers are generally young people, coming into research projects with little to no formal research experience, and working ad hoc on projects. These factors can immediately create an imbalance among the other members of a project as they will often have more experience and are working on contracts full or part time. Some academic researchers have reflected that even the terminology underpinning the co-researcher role can sometimes be othering:



Researcher versus co-researcher, I feel like the whole thing with the co is meant to be equal, but then you automatically kind of create that stratification by adding the co-.”

Academic researcher

What co-researchers provide to the partnership is their lived experience and skills as young people managing mental health issues, alongside other aspects of experience and identity through childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. This is a unique vantage point needed in mental health youth-focused research to enhance and improve it. In our experience, to value this experiential expertise, equity should be promoted ‘top down’. If research leads and their teams value co-researcher involvement – getting to know them as people; fostering mindful, inclusive, reciprocal, and honest relationships – this attitude can trickle down to the entire team.



It doesn't even have to be about like this huge amount of effort that we're making to mitigate those power imbalances. The best thing to do is actually just treat them as we treat each other. I think the label of research versus co-researcher creates some kind of boundary where you forget that you could just ask them what would be best."

Academic researcher

The next section will explore some of the ways equity has been promoted within our co-research work at McPin. The lived experiences co-researchers bring are often marginalised from mainstream society, poorly understood and, at worst, stigmatised and discriminated against. To counter this social injustice, thinking about project design for co-research involvement is vital from the early planning and implementation stages of a project.



As co-researchers, we really want to be valued, we want to be listened to, we want to have real importance."

Co-researcher

Co-researchers on the **Remote Measurement Technologies for Depression in Young People and Universal School Interventions**

projects were given honorary contracts from the associated universities, which gave them access to their own university email account and shared project folders. This meant they were able to more formally liaise with other members of the research team and access the necessary resources need for their roles.

As well as this, the university honorary contracts allowed the co-researchers to feel like a part of the research team, as they provided them with resources that the other researchers access as a matter of course.



Diversity

Marginalised groups such as those who identify as LGBTQ+, racialised communities, disabled people, young carers and those who experience digital exclusion, have unfortunately often been underrepresented within mental health research involvement work. This is problematic as these groups are often the most impacted by mental health issues, and wider health and social care issues. At McPin we are always working to improve how we work with diverse groups and are committed to prioritising those who are typically underrepresented within involvement plans of youth-related mental health projects.

We have found that co-research teams are often small which can make it difficult to include all communities and backgrounds. This can be addressed somewhat by prioritising diversity when recruiting people to roles. Expressing in job advertisements that those from underrepresented, marginalised groups are particularly encouraged to apply, is one way of making efforts to increase diversity.

As working with only a couple of co-researchers can limit diversity, working with a wider group like a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) is a good way to increase different viewpoints and experience inputting into a project. A YPAG is a larger group of young people (usually 6-10) who provide advice and guidance at various stages throughout the research but are not conducting the research directly. [Find out more](#) about YPAGs and our Young People's Network.

Learn more

To learn more about McPin's approach to recruitment take a look at our [Advisory Group resource and checklist, available on our website.](#)

Collaborative project planning and design

A good practice principle for all involvement work, including the co-research model, is involving partners early. In research this means at the project design stage. None of the examples McPin provided on page 7–8 were co-designed with the co-researchers, they were brought on during project delivery. Early engagement can ensure research has lived experience included from inception to dissemination.

A major obstacle to collaborative planning and early involvement is not realising how important it is at the project's outset. Whilst submitting a grant for a developed project to the funder, you may notice the application asks questions about involvement. This is easily fixed by always planning early input from young people.

Another key barrier to early-stage involvement is insufficient budget to pay co-researchers. We have found budgets tend to be small for co-research work. Co-researchers have described a desire for further involvement but due to budget constraints they weren't able to see their ideas carried through. Paying expenses such as travel up front means that co-researcher work is more accessible to a wider group. When working ad hoc most people don't have spare resources to cover expensive train fares and certainly cannot wait three weeks to be reimbursed for train tickets, for example. Having payment protocols in place to expedite things like expenses is vital.



It felt like budget was a constraining factor throughout the entire thing. I'd ask if we could get co-researchers involved in X and the response would be 'I don't know that we have the funds to do it'."

Academic researcher

Involvement should also reflect long-term investment and regard for wellbeing.



You need to put time and effort into doing something like this. It requires resource, it requires time, it's all about building strong relationships with young people. And that's why personally, I think that it needs to be more than just one project, you kind of need to think about this as a strategy that your department is going to use."

McPin staff member



What's your wellbeing plan? What's your payment plan? Planning can alleviate 80% of the issues."

Co-researcher

Proper planning can reduce friction, enhance inclusion, and avoid delays throughout the course of a co-researcher's involvement. If a co-researcher is set up with everything they need before they join a project, smoother operations will follow. For example, providing a co-researcher with an institutional email address will save difficulties further down the line as they will automatically have access to online libraries and resources, shared documents, and tools such as Microsoft Teams. Similarly, if co-researchers will need access to buildings on campus, key cards may need to be issued and sent out. Without fully planning the co-research model, co-researchers can feel tokenistic, which needs to be avoided.



I had to jump through a lot of hoops just to get them to have access to the institution's library services and things like that for doing a realist review and being able to access papers, because they weren't seen as colleagues on that."

Project Manager

Beyond tokenism lies reciprocity

1. Co-design of role and involvement

Co-designing roles alongside co-researchers involves recognising young people's motivations for involvement and their individual strengths whilst simultaneously being mindful of boundaries. We suggest establishing preferred ways of working early, alongside what kind of work your co-researchers are most interested in and how they want to develop in the role.

For example, maybe one person is really interested in doing a particular part of the research process. Perhaps a co-researcher doesn't feel comfortable taking part in a task because of previous trauma or the task is too far out of their comfort zone. Meeting with all the young people on the project one to one early on to find these things out can support individual wellbeing and allow everyone to get the most out of the project.

Encouraging co-researchers to contribute in different ways can also make them feel more comfortable working in their roles, for example using the chat function in Zoom meetings, in case some of the co-researchers don't feel comfortable speaking in front of larger groups of people. It can also benefit the project, with not everyone working on every task spreading the workload across the team.



Involving co-researchers in time and budget allocation can be really helpful. Just asking them what they think. Is this something that you want to do, or would you rather have this time allotted to something else?"

Academic researcher



Involve the co-researchers right from the start. If you know you want to work with co-researchers, approach them early, get them involved as soon as possible. If possible, even in the proposal development phase to not only shape the research, but also the engagement and involvement approach itself."

Project manager

2. Valuing personal motivations and strengths

We have found that an important interest for young people is activism. People get involved in research because they are motivated by social change and justice. Providing a space to explore people's beliefs, motivations and expectations for change are important parts of working with co-researchers. We have found this helps co-researchers to feel respected and allows others in the team without the same experiences to understand their reasons for getting involved.

This shared understanding can help ensure young people's passion to fuel meaningful change can be realised and utilised in the research process. Building a level of rapport and connection with the study team early in the process also creates a sense of belonging, which in turn encourages people to voice any concerns further down the line.

The young people we have worked with tend to have a knack for anything social media related. Therefore, at McPin we have been able to learn from young people, particularly when it comes to using social media for dissemination. Young people have often utilised their strengths and taken the lead on helping with innovative social media dissemination plans.



Everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn."

Co-researcher

3. Mentorship and training

Another way established researchers can redress the balance of power is by providing co-researchers with training in involvement, research methods and processes, and offering more than one-off opportunities to practice these new skills.



I think another thing that is important to doing co-research well is to invest in your co-researchers. See this as an opportunity to create/shape potential future researchers."

Co-researcher

Working as a co-researcher can open doors to many possibilities, as people are able to develop transferable skills and build confidence. There is also an opportunity to develop a network of contacts who could offer them work on future projects, potentially as full-time research assistants.

Building a mentorship relationship with co-researchers can help guide them through the early stages of a potential research career and support their confidence.



It's partly a student mentor kind of relationship in that the co-researcher is learning from a more experienced researcher. And then over time, that person then gains lots and lots of experience."

McPin staff member

The following diagram shows examples of how some academic researchers, and McPin staff, felt co-research could help young people in their professional development. In our experience this development can also be less linear, for example a young person may start in a co-researcher role then join different advisory groups.

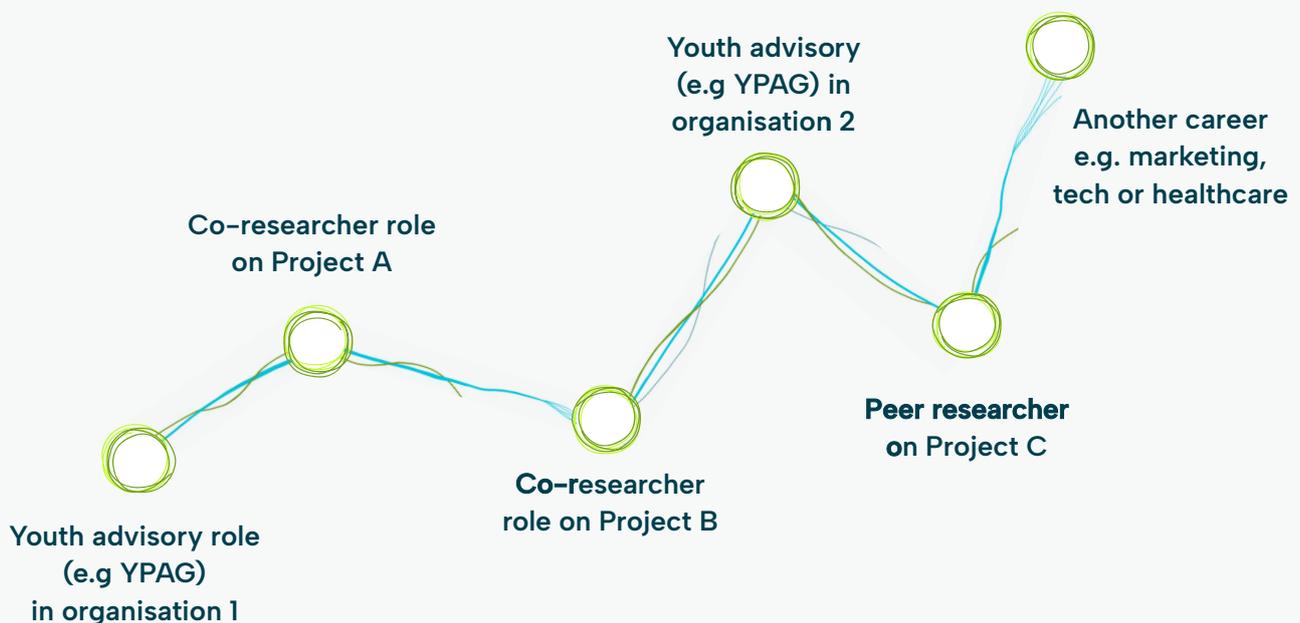


Figure 1: How co-research could help young people in their development

Inclusive working practices

Co-researchers may identify as being from marginalised groups that have experienced significant stigma and discrimination. They may need specific support to enable them to be involved as a co-researcher and have equal access to resources and opportunities. In this section we highlight some of the ways we have done this in our work so far.

1. Person-centred approach

Individual's personal experiences will vary from co-researcher to co-researcher. For example, a group of co-researchers who experience anxiety may experience their anxiety in different ways. It shouldn't be assumed that they will all want to work with their lived experience in the same way and a person-centred approach should be taken. Researchers should avoid using academic jargon when working with co-researchers and explain things in a way that everybody will understand.



A lot of jargon and scientific terminology is used when discussing research or reading academic papers, which can be off-putting for those who aren't as experienced or knowledgeable about the area – so it is important to be mindful of this and use plain language or provide a breakdown of some of these terms.”

Co-researcher

Due to the part-time and ad-hoc nature of the role, co-researchers will often have competing commitments, including other work and education. Giving co-researchers ample time and notice will help them to plan tasks around other responsibilities. Provide options for meeting times and dates that are accommodating, with the understanding that they may not have the capacity to attend every meeting. In conclusion, their wellbeing should be prioritised throughout their involvement.



To do co-research well, I think flexibility is key... flexibility to hold meetings on different days/times, flexibility on deadlines for independent work to be completed, and flexibility in terms of not having to attend every single meeting is key to allowing everyone to be a co-researcher should they want to be.”

Co-researcher

2. Beyond the spoken word

Using different methods for tasks and activities allows for a more inclusive working environment. We know not everyone is comfortable speaking in a meeting so letting the co-researchers know that they can contribute by using the chat function in Zoom, having virtual whiteboard options such as Padlet, Jamboard or Miro can allow more people to contribute more comfortably. It is worth noting that at McPin we do have a 'cameras on' rule for online meetings.

It is important to see colleagues – we've found that it generates more active engagement in meetings. We also find interacting with colleagues can be helped by using break out rooms, which can allow people to feel more comfortable communicating in groups – a necessary research skill.



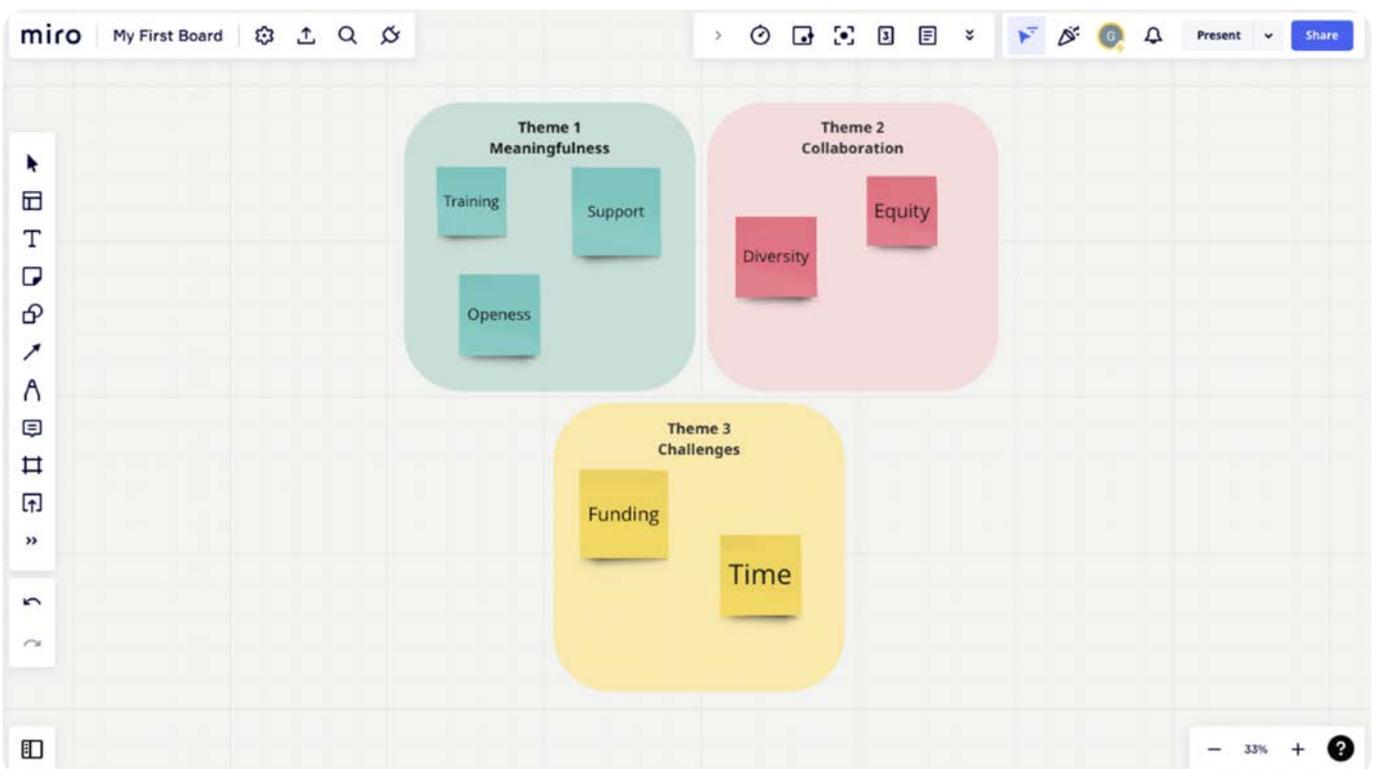
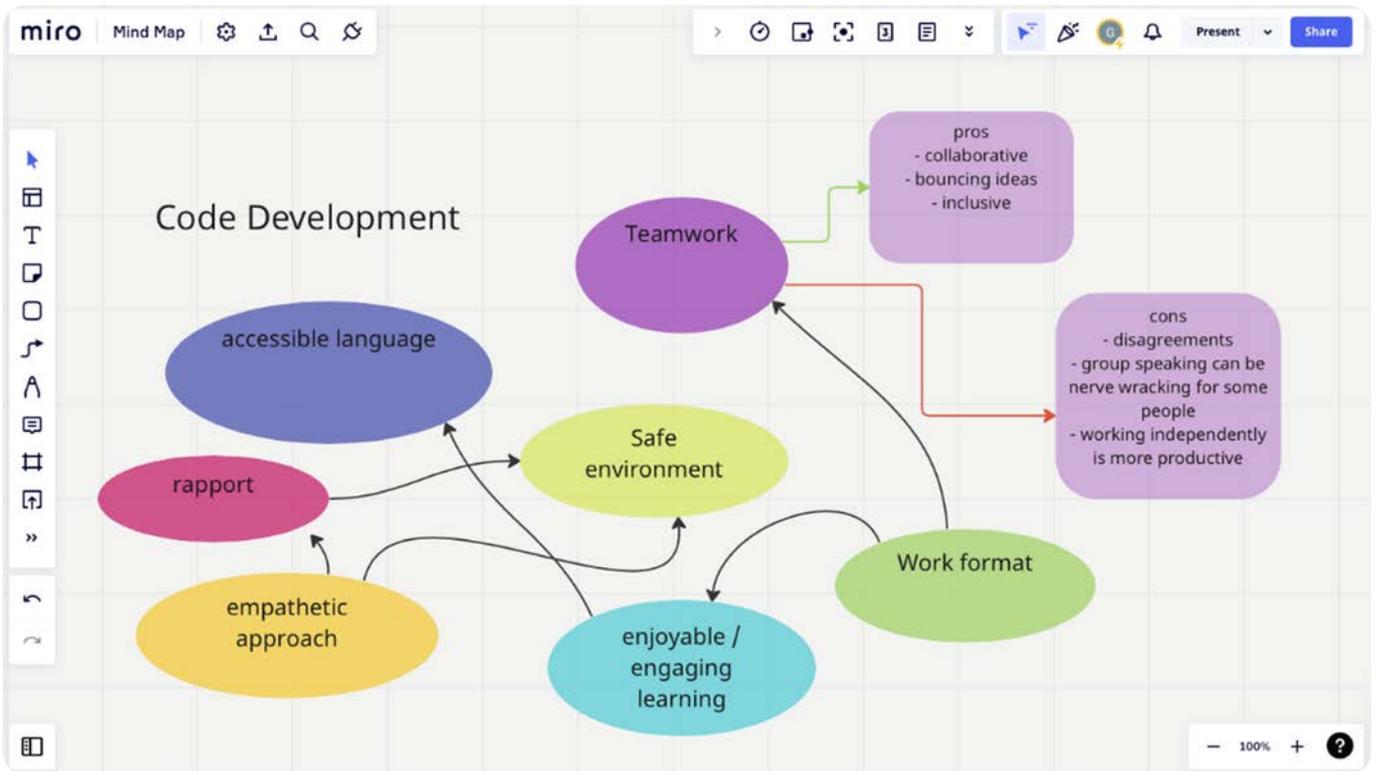
Explain the role as much as possible and be clear that there are elements of it that is learning on the job, training for which will be provided. Just so the co-researcher knows what they are going into. Because co-research is a new role. It's not like a role that everyone knows about.”

Co-researcher

Young people often have great social media and creative skills, therefore it's essential to embrace creative communications and open spaces within the project to allow for creative ideas to be shared and brainstormed.

Case study

On the **CoRAY study** co-researchers assisted with the analysis stage of the study by using Miro to link together themes and codes. Miro allows for information to be displayed visually, so involved lots of colours, shapes and arrows that link all the information together. Working in this way made the data more accessible for the co-researchers and allowed for a more inclusive way of working.



Figures 2 & 3: Examples of how using Miro, a collaborative pinboard tool, can help generate ideas

3. Belonging to the team

Ensure that there is a clear point of contact for the co-researcher. This could be a member of the core research team or a facilitator who is attached to the project. Have one person they can meet with regularly and take ideas or concerns to without pressure.

At McPin, we call this a link worker and the role is similar to a line manager in many ways. We have found regular meetings with this person (once a month for example) has helped co-researchers feel continually engaged, supported, and part of the team.

Case study

Co-researchers on the **Blueprint study and CoRAY projects** were introduced to a link worker at McPin at the very beginning of the study. They met with this team member on a bi-monthly basis for a catch-up, which the co-researchers found was a great method of support and kept them in the loop. The co-researchers were also offered sessions with an external mentor/coach.

This support helped the co-researchers to manage their wellbeing in the workplace, as well as helping them think about their future career goals.

4. Feedback loops

Co-research work ebbs and flows. Keeping co-researchers informed on project progress, sending regular project update emails, and checking in by phone goes a long way to contribute to co-researchers' sense of involvement. These updates should be written in an accessible and digestible manner. However, details shouldn't be omitted based on an assumption that co-researchers might not understand or be interested. It's best to include all the details and explain any complicated terminology, this way they're being kept fully in the loop.

Co-researchers could also be updated by cc'ing them into email chains with the wider team. This can help embed the co-researchers as equal members of the research team. However, this should not be exchanged for direct, personal communication, which is vital for making the co-researchers feel valued as individuals on the project. It should also be kept in mind that some co-researchers may prefer to remain anonymous and may not want to be included in email chains. It's always best to ask the co-researchers at the start of the project what their preferred communication methods are.



Don't be afraid to ask them what they want... just treat them like a member of staff, instead of speculating about what they might want to do or how they might be feeling about something. Just ask them, that's the major piece of advice that I kind of ended up going by."

Academic researcher

Honesty

To avoid misunderstanding and to help build trust we need honest, transparent communication about the expectations and boundaries of a piece of work. We know co-research can go in multiple directions with different roles and relationships developing:

1. Manager to co-researcher

- ⑥ **Be upfront about the ad hoc nature of the work from the beginning.** Ensure that co-researchers know how many hours will be available, including how much they will be paid, and make it clear that this isn't a role that a young person can rely on for income.
- ⑥ **Be transparent about the decision-making processes.** Ensure co-researchers know where they will have input, and how the final decisions are being made and by whom.
- ⑥ **Establish what the expectations and opportunities are within the role early in the project.** Be clear about the tasks co-researchers will be working on, and why some aspects of the work can't have co-researcher input.
- ⑥ As higher periods of activity ebb and flow it is **imperative that co-researchers feel comfortable** coming to the wider team and informing them of their fluctuations in capacity. Creating an environment for this needs to sit with the research team and should be prioritised early on. Clear communication is vital.

2. Co-researcher to manager or other research team members

- ⑥ **Communicate changing capacity level:** Co-researchers are not full-time researchers, and often they have other priorities like school, university, or jobs. Co-researchers need to commit to keeping the wider research team informed about their fluctuating availability as far ahead of time as they can.

3. Researchers to funding bodies

- ⑥ **Be clear on the realities of co-research when speaking with funding bodies.** Co-research takes time – establishing relationships, delivering training, different schedules and flexibility which need to be worked to. Whilst well worth it, this inevitably slows things down. This is something which needs to be acknowledged and addressed in the wider funding system.



Funding bodies are now encouraging in-depth co-research work – which is great – but are still working to research timings. Short-term commissions with really significant meaningful lived experience involvement in a short timescale is really hard to do... These timings have to be allowed and allocated for. And the funding bodies need to see this but as researchers, we have to be aware of these increased time frames."

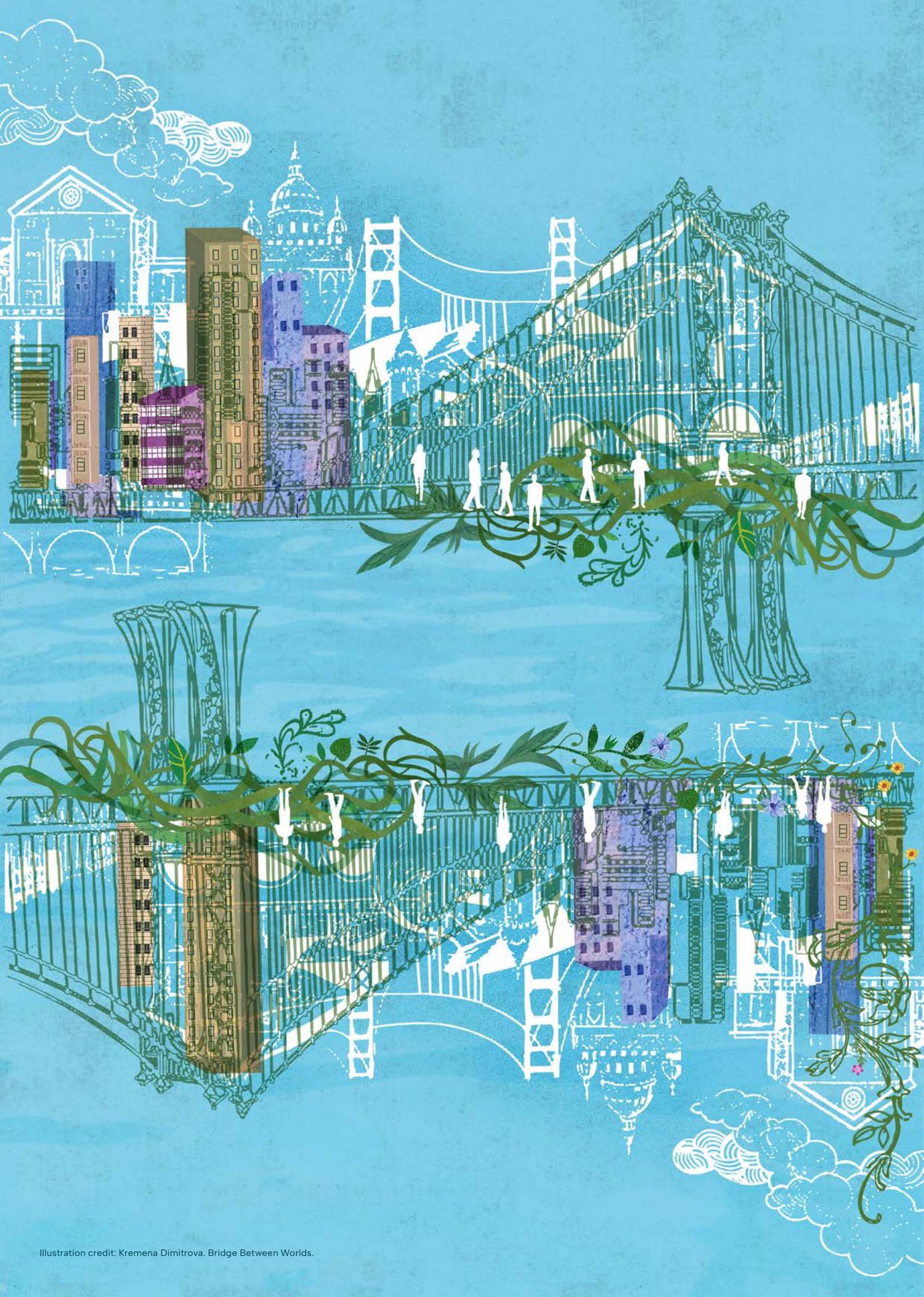
Project manager

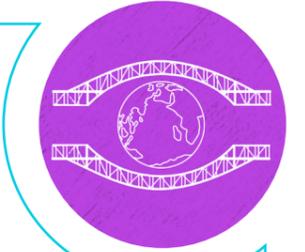


The issue with timing isn't an issue with co-research but is an issue on the institutional funding side of things. Researchers need to be aware that they can't have the same expectation of research culture in co-research."

Project manager

There are a lot of factors to consider when involving young people co-researchers in your projects, which we have summarised in these building blocks. There will be other considerations as well. We have not covered safeguarding in this resource, which requires policies and procedures with specific strategies in place for people under 18 years of age. We have covered the key issues raised by our co-researcher team.





Top ten tips for partners and academics

Inclusivity

1 Ensure co-researchers feel like they are part of a team.

Hold regular meetings with the whole team including senior academics and co applicants. Ask co-researchers if they want to be copied into wider team email chains, so they can stay abreast of project progress. Ask them to contribute to these updates. Build in spaces for both co-researchers and the wider research team collectively to reflect on the process. Have a singular point of contact in the team for the co-researcher.

2 Resource the role well.

Have robust timely payment plans for all the time a co-researcher puts into the project, including skills training. Provide co-researchers with an institutional email and an honorary research contract to cover the whole research process from design work through to dissemination.

3 Provide co-researchers with sufficient training.

It's important young people have the opportunity to understand the processes of the research, so they contribute in meaningful ways both for the benefit of the research process and for their own personal development.

Diversity

4 Think diversity in your involvement strategy.

If working with a small number of co-researchers, complementing the project with a larger, representative advisory group can increase diversity of voices and experiences.

5 Plan for diversity of recruitment to co-researcher roles.

Encourage people from marginalised groups to apply for co-researcher roles on job adverts. Think carefully about where to place the adverts and how they are phrased. Use videos to advertise roles on social media.

Reciprocity

6 Collaboratively create a "ways of working" charter which everyone can sign up to.

Offer involvement choice and options in the charter such as communication preferences, how to support wellbeing, and how co-researchers would like to make decisions together.

7 Build in review periods.

It's always helpful to review current progress and practices so you can gather feedback from co-researchers and others in the team, then adjust where possible. Be forthcoming and encouraging with feedback responses, particularly on where co-researcher input has had significant positive impact and how they could contribute further. Feedback is useful both one to one, and as a review of the whole programme.

8 Focus on the co-researcher's strengths.

These roles ask people to use aspects of their identity to enhance a research process. It is important to be person-centred and strengths-based in your approach, especially about strengths gained via people's lived experiences. Acknowledge the stigma that is attached to these and work together on wellbeing, putting in place emotional support and mentoring alongside formal research skills training to build career pathways.

Honesty

9 Be aware and open about funder expectations and plan well.

This can help ensure that involvement occurs within constraints (time and money) from funding bodies. Be honest about how flexible the core research team can be and where changes to project protocols can be made, and where they cannot.

10 Talk openly about young people's motivations and expectations for the co-researcher role.

This can start in the interview process for the role and continue during onboarding as well as throughout the regular support and supervision sessions across the project. It is important to address any disconnections in team vision and understanding, so expectations can be fairly managed. The key is communication! Keep co-researchers involved in regular project updates as core partners in your work.

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We want mental health to be better understood. Our mission is to improve everyone's mental health through research informed and directed by lived experience expertise. We want the value of lived experience of mental health issues to be upheld and embraced, which is why we put it at the heart of all our work.

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