



Involving Mid-Older LGBT+ People in Transdisciplinary Research and Impact: The IncludeAge Project

Changes, Benefits and Learning from Public Contributors:
Public Involvement Impact Case Study

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With thanks to the rest of the IncludeAge team for their input

Introduction

The UK National Standards of Public Involvement are used as a framework for the ARC EoE Public, Community, Involvement, Engagement and Participation (PCIEP) Strategy and includes 'impact'. We define 'impact' as "**the changes, benefits and learning**, gained from the insights and experiences of patients, carers and the public when working in partnership with researchers and others involved in NIHR initiative's" (*NIHR Patient and Public Involvement Impact Working Group, 2019*). Through this, we seek improvement by identifying and sharing the difference that public involvement makes to research.

The ARC EoE PCIEP Impact Case Studies are used to evaluate the impact of PCIEP on ARC EoE research and to highlight the changes, benefits and learning gained from partnership working and public involvement in ARC EoE.

Public contributors have been invited to co-produce the case studies and the perspectives of public contributors are included in the case study.



Public Involvement Impact Case Study: Involving Mid-Older LGBT+ People in Transdisciplinary Research and Impact: The IncludeAge Project

What problem is this research addressing?

Middle-aged and older-aged LGBT+ people in Britain continue to face exclusion from community places and online spaces due to their age, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Fish & Weiss, 2019). Additional intersecting factors connected to socio-demographic background, ethnicity, disability, religious affiliation, and geographical location can also play their part in exacerbating exclusion.

Experiences of exclusion can stem from a range of systemic factors, including: inadequate provision and maintenance of inclusive spaces; homophobic, ageist, and transphobic societal attitudes; and the lasting impact of historical legal, religious, and medical oppression of LGBT+ people (Bower et al., 2021). Initiatives such as the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Cities and Communities agenda focus on the need and desire for older people to live independently in the community for as long as possible, supporting health and well-being, (particularly) later in life? (Sixsmith et al., 2025). Although these initiatives prove useful/can be valuable, they can overlook how a psychological sense of place and day-to-day experiences of belonging impact mid-older people's experiences of exclusion in physical communities and online spaces. Additionally, they can also homogenise older people's identities and ignore the specific needs of under-served population groups, such as LGBT+ people, with their distinct experiences, needs, and priorities.

Thus, there is thus an urgent need to examine how psychological, cultural, and life experiences of exclusion (and inclusion) influence how mid-to-older LGBT+ people navigate everyday community life. Such understanding can then be harnessed to inform more inclusive policy and (put into) practice targeted specifically at this population group.

Consequently, the IncludeAge project sought to examine how LGBT+ people aged 40 and over in Britain experience place and community, with the wider aim of supporting/contributing to more inclusive policy and practice. An additional pathway of the project also sought to understand these experiences (and inform inclusive policy and practice) among people with intellectual disabilities aged 40+, and aimed to explore any meaningful intersections between these two under-served population groups.

This case study focuses on the involvement of mid-older LGBT+ people in the research and impact activities of the IncludeAge project.

This research benefits mid-older LGBT+ people by: acknowledging/considering their life experiences of inclusion and exclusion; by attending to their day-to-day experiences of place and space; by using lived experiences to shape the development of more inclusive policy and practice directly affecting LGBT+ people, leading to older LGBT+ people feeling safer in their everyday places and online spaces; and by ensuring that the research is carried out and disseminated in ways that are directly informed by LGBT+ people's lived experiences.

How were the public involved in this research?

PPI involvement happened at the research design stage, where sectoral co-applicants contributed to the original funding bid. Elements of public involvement were written in throughout the project's timeline. Key elements included active involvement of sectoral co-applicants in leading project work packages and forming two community advisory groups to offer feedback on public-facing aspects of the research. Perhaps the most important aspect of PPI was recruiting, training, and working with lived experience co-researchers for both pathways of the project, to help generate and analyse data, as well as offer input into knowledge mobilisation and impact activities. Community advisory groups and co-researchers were invited to attend quarterly steering group meetings, which helped them to understand the project in a more holistic way, and to provide their input on decision making for the project. The community advisory groups had a dedicated slot to feedback to the steering group, so that the project team have an opportunity to hear their perspectives.

Four LGBT+ co-researchers were recruited in summer 2023 through existing contacts. Training was provided in October 2023 to undertake life course interviews with LGBT+ participants, in-person or online. Training focused on interview techniques, researcher self-care, ethical conduct, and the life course aspect of the interviews. Between them, the co-researchers conducted around half of the total 76 life course interviews conducted between November 2023 and September 2025. In January 2024, one of the co-researchers stepped back from active participation, and the other three continued to contribute to further stages of data generation, with further ad-hoc training. During data generation, co-researchers met together monthly with members of the wider LGBT+ research team, to 'check-in' and discuss any challenges, and also to reflect on what was emerging from the interviews. Once most of the life course interviews were completed, during 2024, these monthly meetings moved into co-analysis sessions, where co-researchers were invited to reflect on themes and subthemes of the data which was already coded and thematised. These meetings provided sense-checking of data, as well as shifting the analysis method to a more narrative-based one, where we could consider participants' broader life stories in shaping their experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Co-researchers were also invited to help shape and run an additional impact project funded through the ESRC Impact Accelerator Award, with its own spin-off events. With themes around intergenerational contact between LGBT+ people emerging as a priority for participants, we created an impact project designed to teach trainee healthcare practitioners and educators in sensitive communication with LGBT+ people of different generations in their professional settings. Co-

researchers contributed to the design of workshop materials as well as co-facilitating the two workshops and a public engagement workshop with Flourishing Lives and Queer Heritage South in May 2025. A digital toolkit was then co-produced from these workshops that was designed to be used in training/teaching health and care practitioners.

In the autumn of 2025, co-researchers also offered input into the design and running of a series of knowledge mobilisation workshops for the main IncludeAge project, enabling them to contribute to our 'So What?' questions that make the research – and their prior contributions – especially vital. Co-researchers were also invited to contribute to peer-reviewed publications, to help disseminate findings.

In October 2025, co-researchers met in-person with wider members of the LGBT+ research team of IncludeAge, including some of the sectoral co-applicants (listed above), to explore experiences of undertaking the research and being part of the project. This enabled explicit discussion of positive and negative outcomes.

What were the outcomes of public involvement in this project?

Positive outcomes include the opportunity to learn about other LGBT+ people's lived experiences, the opportunity to contribute not just to data generation, but to follow through and shape the analysis process and knowledge mobilisation phase of the project. For example, co-analysis with co-researchers informed the selection of lived experience data to be transformed into vignettes in the digital toolkit to be used in training/teaching health and care practitioners. Co-researchers also appreciated the ability to form close working relationships with each other, in part afforded through regular check-ins with members of the project team and with each other.

A negative outcome was the withdrawal of one of the co-researchers during the project. This related to personal issues but also challenges in their ability to feel able to contribute fully. We were unable to resolve these issues to facilitate this co-researcher's ongoing involvement - something we reflected on in the October 2025 meeting. Connections with the intellectual disability pathway of the project could have been strengthened to help feel that co-researchers were feeding into the whole project, rather than just the LGBT+ pathway.

We were able to recruit the co-researchers as employees at the University of Hertfordshire. There were challenges with onboarding co-researchers through HR University processes but the availability and assistance of a dedicated PPI specialist in the CRIPACC team at Hertfordshire was extremely valuable.

How did public involvement influence the project overall?

Public involvement – specifically, the inclusion of LGBT+ co-researchers, has had a substantial influence on the IncludeAge project overall. Co-researchers conducted around half of the life course interviews, utilised their own networks to recruit a diverse range of participants, offered crucial insights into the emerging themes from the life course interview data, and helped shape the design of knowledge mobilisation and impact activities and outputs.

Co-researchers have been instrumental in developing our project exhibition, which began in Dundee in summer 2025. They have also helped develop the LGBT+ focused exhibition at the Bonington Gallery in Nottingham, during LGBT+ History Month 2026, where they provided input into the

selection of materials and the development of engagement workshops led by Midlands4Cities doctoral students.

Co-researcher involvement meant the project took an explicit rights-based approach, which was previously only implicit in the project's design. Co-researcher expertise in sexual health, LGBT+ rights, and social work consistently highlighted aspects around legal and rights-based inclusion for our LGBT+ participants.

The diversity of LGBT+ identities within the co-researcher team also influenced discussions around intersectionality in the project, particularly around participant recruitment and involvement in the knowledge mobilisation workshops in autumn 2025. Two of these workshops in particular enabled project team members (including co-researchers) to sense-check key themes from the data with people with lived experience. Responses from attendees then helped to shape further workshops with policymakers and practitioners, highlighting key aspects for further attention. The key question was always: who needs to hear about our findings, and how can we best reach them?

What was the feedback from public contributors involved in this project?

Co-researchers have consistently been invited to reflect on the value of their involvement in the project, and what it means for them as both a professional and an LGBT+ person. These extracts are selected from material solicited from the co-researchers in 2025. Two co-researchers offered responses at the time of writing this case study.

'I feel more connected to the past, present and future in ways I had not expected. I am not as alone as I thought I was, sharing memories, thoughts and feelings similar to my own. I am grateful to keep learning, and it has been a privilege.' Sallie Johnson

'I've refreshed and gained research skills, I've enjoyed and learned from working as a multidisciplinary team, I've learned from both co-researchers and the participants about their lives, loves, struggles and successes. I hope that I have also made a valuable contribution to the academic research and LGBT+ community sectors.'

Phil Eaglesham

Co-researchers were also asked to offer tips for other researchers who might be thinking of using life course interviews in their research, specifically with LGBT+ people.

'Be honest and emotionally engaging, generous with your time and pay intentional intention to what is being said to you. Always check that you have understood what has been said so you don't dilute the impact of their truth. It's not your story. Remember that this method of research can be invasive and intrusive to people who may already have had difficult experiences. Be kind.' Sallie Johnson

'I'd actively encourage anyone with the time and empathy to consider learning this approach - the skills will be sharpened and the support is there to make it happen. Both the delivery and more importantly for me, sharing in the analysis process gives great and new insights, shared learning and a feeling of connection within the LGBT+ community'. Phil Eaglesham

What are the reflections and learning from public involvement in this research?

Investing in co-researchers in terms of costing in sufficient time for their involvement is absolutely crucial. The LGBT+ co-researchers in IncludeAge have had an instrumental role in not only shaping the data generated, but also in shaping the overall research culture within the project. In large transdisciplinary projects like IncludeAge, with multiple people, institutions, and organisations involved, it is essential to ensure enough time and resources are given for teams to meet up (ideally in person) to both reflect on their work and socialise (Vytņiorgu et al., 2025).

Secondly, co-research or peer research can often be limited to asking co-researchers to help generate or collect data (Willis, Almack, Hafford-Letchfield, 2018). Within IncludeAge, we decided early on to invite them to help analyse the data and answer the 'so what?' question. Guided by co-researcher interests and commitments, we then shaped the co-analysis to be meaningful to them, which ultimately meant that they felt they were impacting directly on other LGBT+ lives.

Losing a co-researcher along the way was a blow for the project, and something that on reflection we might have avoided. But we also recognised that for long projects spanning multiple years, 'life' also happens, and sometimes people need to take breaks. Essential though it is that enthusiasm and commitment to the project is sustained, it's also important to know when to let things go, to regroup, and to move forwards to help shape the future of the project.

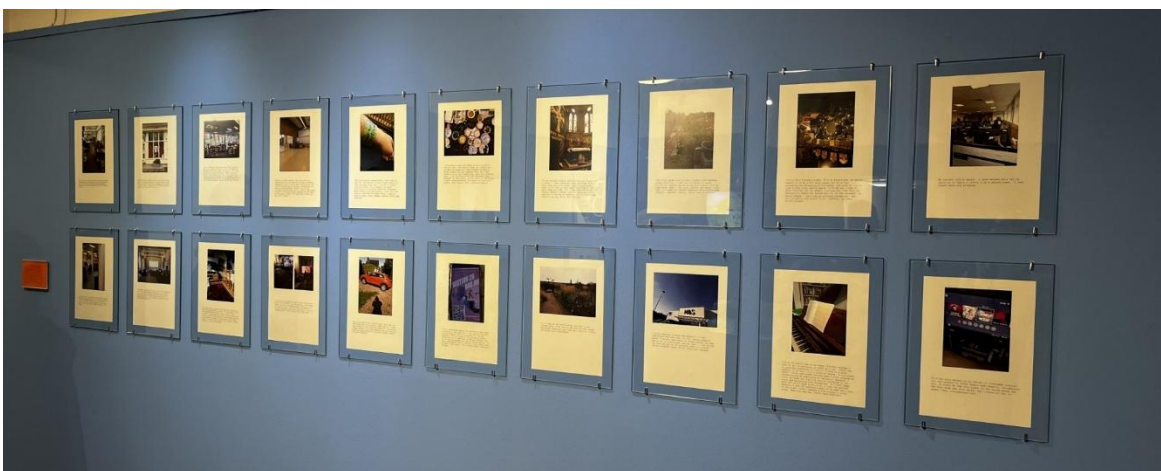
If there was one thing we might have done differently, it would have been to ensure that other forms of public involvement in the project were as energised as was the involvement of the LGBT+ co-researchers. Co-applicants from LGBT+ organisations, in addition to the LGBT+ Community Advisory Group, haven't always felt as connected with the project as they might have been. It seems important to direct sufficient resources and consideration to orchestrating different components of PPI in a project, to ensure that those who want to be involved, can be.

Further information

See the project website, for more information: www.includeage.co.uk

See also the publication on using poetry to foster inclusion in transdisciplinary research – a poem the co-researchers contributed to: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10778004241310179>

See Image below of the [IncludeAge LGBT+ exhibition](#) being held in Nottingham,



See below for some of the co-produced outputs with the co-researchers:

- Illustrations by Joel Cooper from composite vignettes which were co-produced with the co-researchers for the ESRC IAA project.



- Visual minutes from an additional workshop with [Flourishing Lives and Queer Heritage South](#), co-produced with the co-researchers, on LGBTQ+ intergenerational practice.

LGBTQ+ History and Intergenerational Practice: Getting the Balance Right (May 13, 2025)

1. Generations in LGBTQ+ can span a couple of years or decades, depending on shared histories and experiences. There is an ongoing need to **queer** the concept of generations so that the term has real meaning for LGBTQ+ individuals.

2. Visual presentations of queer people can resurface, enabling visible LGBTQ+ intergenerational similarities across relatively short periods of time.

3. Younger and older LGBTQ+ people can be brought together through traumatic experiences, but holding **space** for that trauma during intergenerational practice is worth it to develop meaningful interactions.

4. It's important to understand and respect the stories and experiences of older LGBTQ+ people, who can hide their identities through fear of discrimination. Some may also be anxious about the word 'queer'. It's also important to recognise younger LGBTQ+ people may feel anxious about talking to older LGBTQ+ people.

5. It's vital to capture and preserve LGBTQ+ histories. Harnessing the digital can be very helpful in capturing such histories. But there is also a need to create sustainable ways to archive digital artefacts, so that they can be used in future intergenerational practice.

6. Key take-home messages:

- Intergenerational practice with LGBTQ+ people can be an **absolute joy!**
- Get people in the room! "If in doubt have an event!"
- Bring together through finding things in common.
- Community engagement is essential for mobilising LGBTQ+ histories, "What's the worst that can happen?"

Our Histories

Different Generations - things in common

Gay Pride

Posters, Magazines, Reports, Books

UK Research Council Economic and Social Research Council

Queer Heritage South

Flourishing Lives

Include Age

The Baring Foundation

COMMUNITY FUND

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The case study template is informed by GRIPP 2-SF (Staniszewska et al., 2017)

For more information, visit the [project webpage](#)

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