

THE POWER OF PEER: SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED AND LIVING EXPERIENCE IN RESEARCH AND EVALUATION WORK.

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Background

Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) has been at the forefront of supporting involvement of people with lived and living experience (LLE) in research and evaluation for over two decades. Encouragingly, involvement of LLE and patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE) are becoming increasingly valued and common within this field. However, it is important approaches are truly meaningful, carefully considered and empowering to those included to maximise the positive impacts.

Description of model of care/intervention/program

SDF's peer research model developed over the last 20 years has built the capacity of people with LLE to be meaningfully involved with research and evaluation on issues that directly impact their communities such as:

- Scotland's National Mission on Drugs
- Implementation of the MAT standards
- Experiences of long-acting injectable buprenorphine
- Women's experiences of treatment and support
- Coexisting mental health and substance use

Effectiveness

In 2024-2025, 28 peers with LLE conducted 658 interviews over 5 research and evaluation projects across 30 local authority areas in Scotland. Feedback has identified that peer research:

- Builds trust and encourages greater openness, leading to richer, more accurate data.
- Provides access to marginalised or hard-to-reach groups.
- Generates insights that are highly relevant and grounded in lived experience.
- Empowers peer researchers through skill development and supportive engagement.
- Strengthens community involvement and informs more effective, co-produced services

Conclusion and next steps

The impact of involving individuals with LLE in research is invaluable and far-reaching. Meaningful involvement can ensure voices of LLE are not only heard but actively shape impactful and lasting change. Key principles to achieving meaningful involvement include addressing tokenism and power imbalances, creating accessible and inclusive research environments that enable participation and providing appropriate support, training and development which prioritises well-being. Investment of adequate time and resources for PPIE- including experienced staff to support individuals- is necessary for truly meaningful involvement.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

No disclosures to note for this work.

The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.