

Peer Research in Housing and Homelessness: The Value and Practical Issues

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What is Peer Research?

- Peer research is a methodology
- It is research designed and conducted by people with lived experience in collaboration with professionals
- Developed from the traditions of ‘action’ and ‘empowerment’ research
- Peer Researchers are the ‘experts’

Peer Research Team



Focus Ireland Peer Research Programme

Period	Project/s
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus Ireland Customer Charter• European RE-InVEST project
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer Satisfaction Survey (Focus Ireland)
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tenancy Sustainment tracking (Focus Ireland)• Long-Term Housing Tenants Satisfaction Levels (Focus Ireland)
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• European Seminar in Peer Research
2021-22	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer Research Guidebook
2021 –	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HSE/TCD study exploring volunteering support needs for people with experience of homelessness
2022-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study of housing attitudes and needs of older tenants• Customer Satisfaction Survey (Focus Ireland)

REPORT



The award was shared
between the following
organisations:
FOCUS Ireland
The National Council
for Homelessness
The National Children's
Agency
The National Domestic
Violence Helpline
The National Homelessness
Charity

FOCUS
Ireland

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

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The Value of Peer Research

Research Design

- ❑ Peer researchers bring ‘insider knowledge’ of the community being researched.
- ❑ Peer researchers can bring context and insight to shape the research design
- ❑ **Example:** co-design of interview schedule for study exploring supports for people with experience of homelessness to volunteer in the community

Recruitment

- ❑ Peer researchers can help to locate and identify research participants.
- ❑ Peer researchers can build trust and can engage and empower people to participate in research.
- ❑ **Example:** facilitating information sessions in homeless services and recruiting research participants for Re-Invest project

Quality of Data

- ❑ Peer researchers can help to design and pilot research instruments to check for meaning and language
- ❑ Peer researchers shared experiences with research participants can improve data collection and produce richer data
- ❑ **Example:** research participants in homeless services 'opening up' during interviews due to shared experiences, resulting in rich data.

Safeguarding (for research participants)

- ❑ Fundamental ethical principle
- ❑ Peer researchers have lived experiences that enables them to recognise research participants in need and link them to supports
- ❑ **Example:** shared experiences has helped to recognise research participants in crisis and signpost them to supports

Communication

- ❑ Peer researchers can assist with translation of academic jargon to accessible 'Plain English' reports and presentations
- ❑ Engage multiple audiences e.g. service users and frontline staff
- ❑ **Example:** drafted a 'Plain English' summary version of an evaluation report aimed at customers and staff

Added Benefits

For Peer Researchers

- New skills and development
- Improved self confidence, quality of life, mental health, financial situation

For Professional Researchers

- New skills and development: learning new methods
- Transformative and rewarding process

For Organisations

- Greater diversity and inclusion
- Greater insight/better research
- Staff learn and develop transferable skills

The Practical Issues

Ethics and Safeguarding

- Recruitment of peer researchers needs to consider their closeness to research participants.
- Transparency and consent are vital.
- Professionals need to schedule time for debriefs and support plans
- Post-project opportunities should be built into project plans.
- Maintain professional boundaries and a balance between support and dependency

Equal Treatment

- ❑ Projects must be based on an equal relationship between professional and peer researchers.
- ❑ Equal treatment and recognition are key to avoiding tokenism.
- ❑ The work of peer researchers must be valued and compensated.

Training and Development

- ❑ Approach training as an investment in people and their growth.
- ❑ Approach training as an incentive for participation.
- ❑ Ensure training is accessible and flexible.
- ❑ Ensure the trainer has the right skills.

Planning and Flexibility

- Planning and facilitating training requires significant time and effort.
- Make time for early-stage team bonding and building before the project starts.
- Robust support structures are crucial.
- Prepare for gaps and absences in participation.

Participation & Managing Expectations

- Work with peer researchers to agree roles and levels of participation.
- Provide complete clarity about the project timeline, work demands and compensation
- Provide clarity about what comes next

Role of the 'Professional'

- ❑ Professionals should be comfortable with conflict and difficult conversations.
- ❑ Being flexible and adaptable are key traits for success.
- ❑ Professionals must maintain a consistent and committed attitude

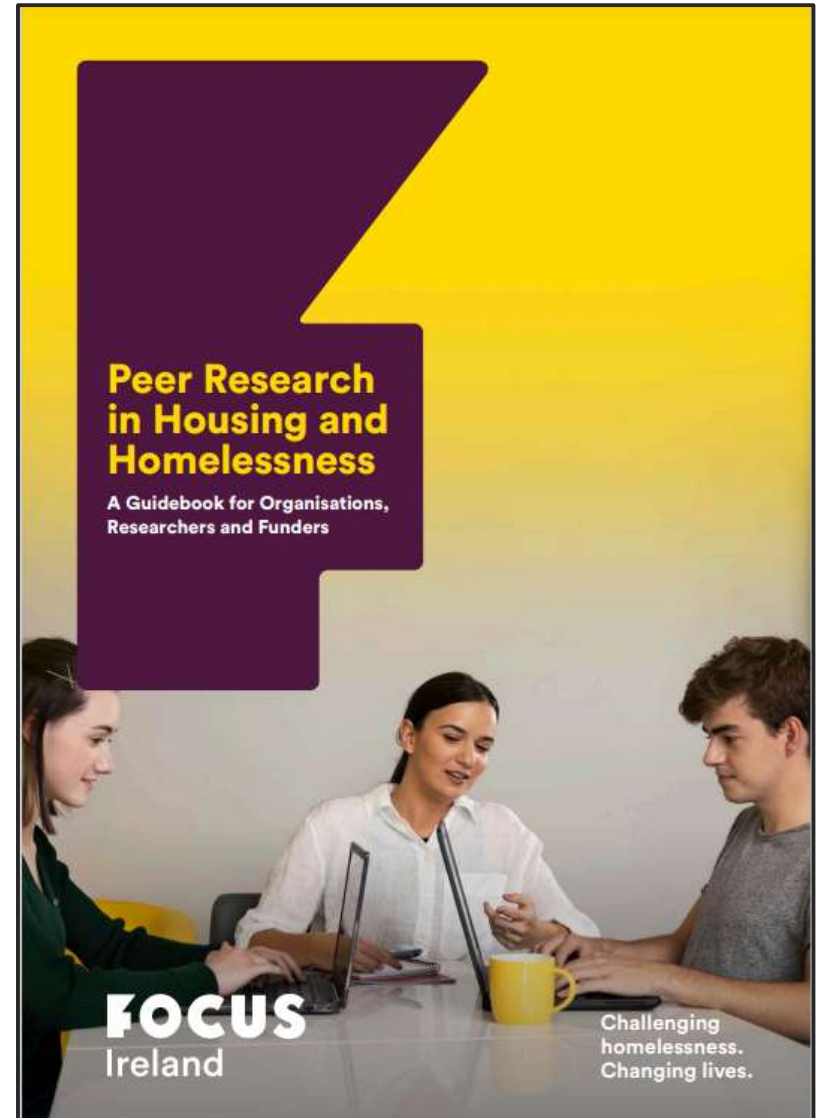
Long-term Development

- ❑ The long-term development of the peer researcher is a central concern
- ❑ Peer researchers can be supported to work on new research projects
- ❑ Opportunities and progression should be based on the interests of the peer researcher

Peer Research Guidebook

Available from the Focus Ireland website

www.focusireland.ie





Thank You.