



# Overview

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- ▶ Overview of our project
- ▶ Context of participation in Local Authorities
- ▶ History and principles of Participatory Action Research
- ▶ Cycles of PAR in this project – Cycle 1
- ▶ Cycle 2
- ▶ Plans for Cycle 3
- ▶ Challenges of PAR
- ▶ Potential benefits of PAR



# Participation – Our Project

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- ▶ 30 month Knowledge Transfer Partnership- Nottingham Trent University and Nottinghamshire County Council
- ▶ Review, map and improve service design and delivery
- ▶ Evidence informed practice through anchor institution
- ▶ Key focus - increasing and improving participation of children and young people
- ▶ Aim to conduct Participatory Action Research (PAR) with children and young people



# Participation - Context

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- ▶ Participation of children and young people vital for service design and delivery to be targeted, relevant and effective
- ▶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed into UK law in 1992): *When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account*
- ▶ The Council and its partners have a participation strategy, detailing key priorities and actions required to increase participation

Nottinghamshire Children,  
Young People and Families  
Participation Strategy



# Participatory Action Research

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## *History*

- ▶ Origins in Lewin (1946, 1952) as social research which aims for action and positive change
- ▶ Action research and PAR have taken many forms in different fields
- ▶ In UK, Australia and Europe PAR developed a focus toward professional practice, whilst in US, Canada and Latin America focus towards community action (Stern et al, 2014)

## *Principles*

- ▶ Active involvement, empowerment, valuing knowledge and experiences
- ▶ Power – challenge to traditional imbalance of power within research
- ▶ Action – transformation of research into applied practice
- ▶ Challenges conventional dichotomies of researcher/researched



# PAR – Cyclical Process

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## Cyclical process

- ▶ Planning – the collecting of information and data about the research topic
- ▶ Action – participants lead action designed to improve situation
- ▶ Review – whether action was successful and why



# Cyclical Process of PAR – Cycle 1

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- ▶ Created open, general plans for participants to shape research and decide key issues
  - ▶ Met with many children, young people and their workers to engage them directly with the project
  - ▶ Met with Children in Care Council (a standing participatory arrangement) and other existing groups
  - ▶ **Outcomes and Learning**
    - ▶ Challenges accessing potential participants
    - ▶ Difficulties conveying principles of research to staff and services
    - ▶ Problems in communicating plans to children and young people in advance of attending their existing meetings
    - ▶ Unable to set up dedicated group to conduct PAR, required us to refocus plans
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# Cycle 2

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- ▶ Refocused on a key area for the Council – children and young people in areas of poverty and deprivation
- ▶ Met with services, children’s workers and stakeholders in three locations to explain research and facilitate engaging participants
- ▶ Made clear, children focused information for participants
- ▶ **Outcomes and learning**
  - ▶ Meetings took place just before the summer, and with budget restraints many services shut
  - ▶ Some of the services conducted some participatory activities
  - ▶ Attempts to reconvene with services and stakeholders in the autumn were not successful, and a service restructure was a key barrier
  - ▶ Met with small groups of children and young people, to conduct other participatory activities and engage participants directly



# Cycle 3 – Current Plans

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- ▶ “What’s it like growing up in Nottinghamshire?”
  - ▶ Young People’s Board acting as advisory group, agreed to engage others to video an average day in their lives, to answer this question
  - ▶ Plan to work with participants, to introduce the research, ethical guidelines and safeguarding precautions
  - ▶ Participants will film a day in their lives using their smartphones
  - ▶ Meet with individual participants to support them to review and analyse video using CAQDAS, identifying any areas for action
  - ▶ Organise focus groups/workshops/activity days with participants if they draw out common themes, areas for action, or feel an issue warrants further research
  - ▶ Findings to be fed back directly to participants, to the Council, the University and local services



# Challenges of conducting PAR

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Numerous challenges of conducting PAR, both in general, and specifically in large and complex organisations:

- ▶ **Lack of funding and resources** – whilst organisations support participation in principle, they are severely restricted in facilitating it
- ▶ **Motivation/justification**—where no service benefits are guaranteed, difficult to secure sufficient buy-in and on-going investment in research
- ▶ **Logistics**—can be very difficult to arrange research activities in LA's
- ▶ **Access to potential participants** – perennial research problem starker when participants lead process and gatekeepers unable to arrange access
- ▶ **Funding** – participants should be compensated for their engagement, local authorities increasingly struggle to support and fund participation
- ▶ **Participant motivation** – particularly with children and young people, motivation and excitement to participate can dissipate quickly



# Potential Benefits of PAR

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- ▶ For children and young people, through:
  - ▶ skills development, raising aspirations and building confidence
  - ▶ being listened to, and opportunity to share experiences and ideas and improve services designed to meet their needs
  - ▶ promoting active citizenship
- ▶ For the local authority, through:
  - ▶ meeting actual rather than assumed needs, leading to improved impact, targeting of services, and a reduction in costs
  - ▶ children and young people bringing a fresh perspective and creative new ideas
  - ▶ building the principles and practice of participation more widely into services, overcoming current difficulties
- ▶ For the University through:
  - ▶ improving links to local children and young people as research participants
  - ▶ data generated from research can be utilised for various research outputs
  - ▶ using learning from this project and its challenges to inform future research



# References

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- ▶ Lewin, K. (1946) 'Action research and minority problems', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 34–46
- ▶ Stern et al (2014) *Action Research, Innovation and Change: International perspectives across disciplines* London: Routledge

## Other texts:

- ▶ Chevalier, J. M. (2015) *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry*. London: Sage
- ▶ McIntyre, A. (2008) *Participatory Action Research* London: Sage
- ▶ Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2001) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage



# Any questions?

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