The currency of colleaguehood

Insider researchers in a charitable trust

barn wood

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Working to create the best possible environment in Gloucestershire for disabled people and people with mental health problems to make the most of their lives

Grants

For individuals, communities, and organisations

Community Building

Inclusive 'Asset-Based Community Development'

Individual support

Nurturing passions and facilitating connections

Learning Programme

Free workshops and learning opportunities

Our research: Capturing context, process, reach and impact

2016

2019

45 interviews with 6 colleagues

Working with Barnwood

People's lives

34 interviews with people our colleagues worked with

Contact

Grants

Quant data about 400 beneficiaries over twelve months

Profiles

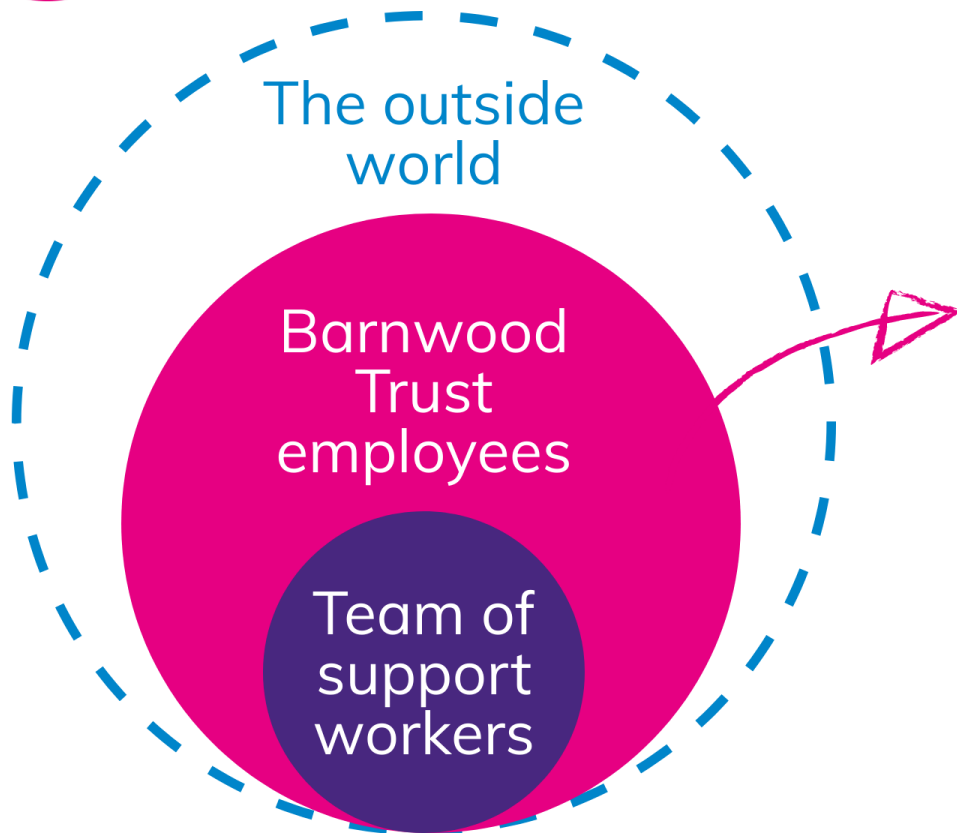The outside world

Barnwood Trust employees

Team of support workers

- Members of their organisation
  - but not in their team

- Pre-existing relationship as colleagues
  - but not particularly close

- Knowledge of geographic areas
  - but not current residents

- Familiarity with the broader issues affecting the people they work with

- Shared organisational values & culture

- Shared interest in Barnwood's success

Relationships with our co-workers

- Each of our colleagues worked with one researcher
- Researchers matched with colleagues

Colleagues

Researchers & participants

Near-friendship

Data collection with our colleagues

Developing relationships of trust

Being flexible

Being useful

- Some initial reticence
- Easier opportunities to connect
- Transferred trust via organisational authority & shared values
- *Demonstrating* trustworthiness
- Human connections too - but clarity about your hat!

- Methods, timescales, locations (shared calendars)
- Shared management permitted flexibility

I always looked forward to [the interviews] and **felt so much better** afterwards.

And in the telling of something [...] I'd realise, Oh yeah! **It would make me think** about what was happening.

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If you've got somebody outside the organisation [...] **would we have been a bit guarded about criticising the organisation?** I don't think any of us have been shy of criticising the organisation with you researching, it would be fair to say! [...] To say that to someone who's outside would come across as quite severe criticism, that there's something seriously wrong – and there isn't anything seriously wrong, it just needs tweaking…

I wonder if the dynamic would have been different for me if it was external? I would **probably have been less comfortable to be open** because I wouldn't have known what was being 'reported'…

Data gathered

- Nature of their work, developing their roles

- Personal and emotional challenges in doing the work

- Feelings and views on the organisation - including critical views

- The work they're doing with the people they're working with, including challenges, frustrations, and successes

- Details about the people they work with: health, life experiences, family circumstances, interaction with statutory services…

Data collection with the people our colleagues worked with

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Our colleagues as gatekeepers

I was quite selective with the people who I put forward [...] It was a gut feeling, it's **whether you feel someone's up to talking** about the shit that they live in...

Depends entirely on the people, there were some who really wanted to be asked and to share and for their experiences to be validated [...] **Others said, 'I'll do it for you' - I didn't pass those on...**

Establishing trust with our colleagues

I wouldn't have been able to connect anyone to external researchers or to an organisation that I wasn't **absolutely sure would honour their words** and their feelings - I'm **still not 100% comfortable** with it and am mindful that it could verge on exploitative if not done in a very specific way but **the fact that we can openly discuss the potential of it being exploitative is a safeguard** to that being the case.

Establishing trust with the people they worked with

- **Transferred trust** - both via our association with our colleagues, and via the grants awarded

- **Risk of complex motive**: access to our colleagues' time or to additional grants

- Necessity of repeated **reassurance**, **clarity**, and **distance**

Data gathered

I think it helped the person feel more part of the whole. More personal... it was me connecting them with someone else that I knew; "This is my colleague" - I wasn't just connecting them as a subject of research [...] **I think people agreed more if they knew it was somebody that we worked with**. I don't think that people would have agreed as much if it was an external person who we didn't know [...] I think they would have been more wary.

- What Barnwood's work has meant for them (including where it has fallen short)

- Health conditions, disability, mental health, stigma, pain, loss of a former life

- Being a carer; parenting disabled children

- Social care, benefits, housing, austerity

- Loneliness and isolation, trauma, abuse, homelessness, substance misuse, sex work

Analysis & early internal dissemination

Being useful

- Judicious use of quant data
- Offering support with team-held monitoring
- Responding to team requests for analysis of particular datasets

> […] they were **really useful** for helping us – it was a framework, this is what [the work is] looking like.

Recognising limitations of usefulness

> I found it hard when some of the things that had come out **weren't necessarily what I wanted** to… the bits I wanted to discard

> …there is a sense that **it will always be historic** […] the outcomes are so absolutely indicative of where we were then, it's not always reflective of where we are now.

Clarity and boundaries

- Recognising tendency towards protectiveness: beware over-sensitivity in analysing and sharing more controversial findings
- Avoiding involvement in internal team dynamics
- Focusing on robust analysis, aiming for neutrality, reflecting our positionality, and maintaining strict ethical boundaries over the use of data

Our positionality: Summary of challenges & opportunities

Opportunities afforded us

- **Logistical ease**: shared spaces, shared calendars

- Prior **understanding** of organisational programmes and values

- **Flexibility** afforded by shared management

- **Shortcut** to access, acceptance and **trust** for participants

- Ability to gather **rich, varied** and often **sensitive data**

Most significant challenges

- Ensuring **clarity** with participants (both our colleagues and the people they worked with): mitigating **inappropriate motives** associated with our positionality

- Acknowledging and mitigating our **emotional investment** during analysis & dissemination

- Guarding against **internal pressures** for analysis which may not align with the aims of the research

- **Balancing** aim of being useful with our own timescale and plans

Final thoughts

"...one does not have to be a member of the group being studied to appreciate and adequately represent the experience of the participants. Instead, we posit that **the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested** in the experience of one's research participants, and **committed** to accurately and adequately representing their experience."

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 54–63

Be flexible, but hold onto your aims

Be useful where you can

Be clear which hat you're wearing

Everything rests on your integrity