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# HeadStart Kernow Learning: Co-researching digitally during the coronavirus pandemic: a case-study (December 2020)

## Looking for a new experience?



HeadStart Kernow are looking for four young people aged 11-25 to join them as co-researchers on a project around 'civic activism'.

We know that all young people would have a great time co-researching on this exciting project, however we are particularly interested in inviting young people that routinely get missed out of these types of opportunities. From experience we know these can be young people with disabilities, or those on free school meals, or those from our Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities, LGBTQ communities etc

### Why apply?

This is a unique opportunity to be involved in research which will involve people from different parts of the county. It is an opportunity to build confidence, experience, skills and knowledge as well as connecting with new people. Please see the Co-Researcher Application Form for more information.

### To apply:

If, once you've read the information on the Co-Researcher Application Form, you think this is for you, please complete the form and send to [headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk)



Any questions or for more information, please contact [headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk) or call Hannah 07968 892 821  
Applications close on Friday 10th July 2020. Successful applicants will be contacted w/c 13th July 2020.



## Contents

Background.....	2
Learning .....	4
Summary of findings .....	15
Surrounding literature on online engagement .....	16
Acknowledgments and thanks .....	17
Resources .....	18
References.....	19
Appendix: Risk Assessment.....	21

For more titles in this series see:  
<https://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/learning/local-learning/>

## Background

This case-study describes an eight-week online co-researching project conducted during summer 2020 at the time of the Coronavirus pandemic. It describes the HeadStart Kernow (Cornwall) experience of participation in the multi-partner research project 'Nothing About Us Without Us' and identifies key learning for local authorities and academic institutions who are planning to work in partnership on a co-researching project.

It describes:

- how Cornwall successfully recruited four youth co-researchers with lived experience of disadvantage onto this project and supported them throughout the eight-week period;
- how the partners worked to trouble shoot challenges related to online participation;
- and how we contributed to project outcomes.

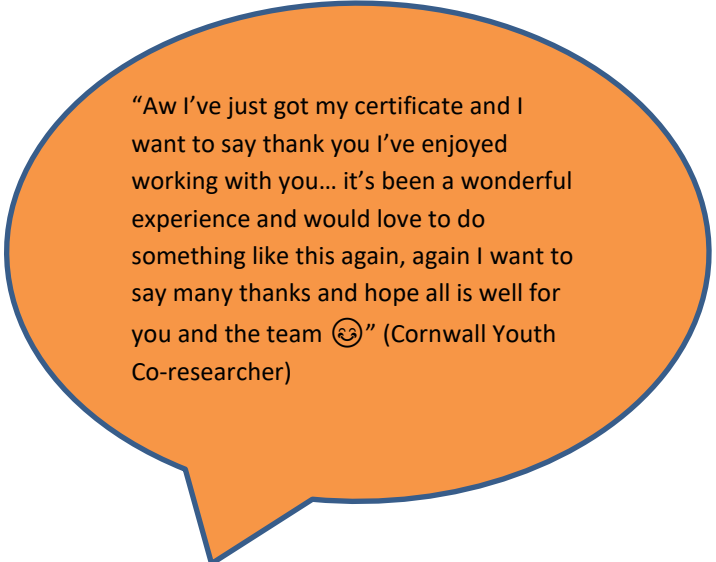
The engagement mainly consisted of a weekly meeting on a Monday afternoon (3.45pm-5pm) for eight weeks with co-researchers across the three local authority areas. The project partners were:

- Youth co-researchers from Blackpool, Newham and Cornwall
- Adult co-researchers from Blackpool, Newham and Cornwall
- Academics from Queen's University Belfast and University of Brighton

Cornwall's role was:

- to recruit Cornwall youth co-researchers;
- to support the appointed youth co-researchers to access the group sessions;
- to enable the youth co-researchers to achieve their personal goals and objectives;
- and to work in partnership to achieve the project objectives.

The Cornwall young people stated that they would be interested in being engaged in the next phase of the project and gave consent to be kept informed about future engagement opportunities.



"Aw I've just got my certificate and I want to say thank you I've enjoyed working with you... it's been a wonderful experience and would love to do something like this again, again I want to say many thanks and hope all is well for you and the team 😊" (Cornwall Youth Co-researcher)

This case-study is understood in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states the right of the child to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously (Article 12). It is written from a Cornwall perspective and uses

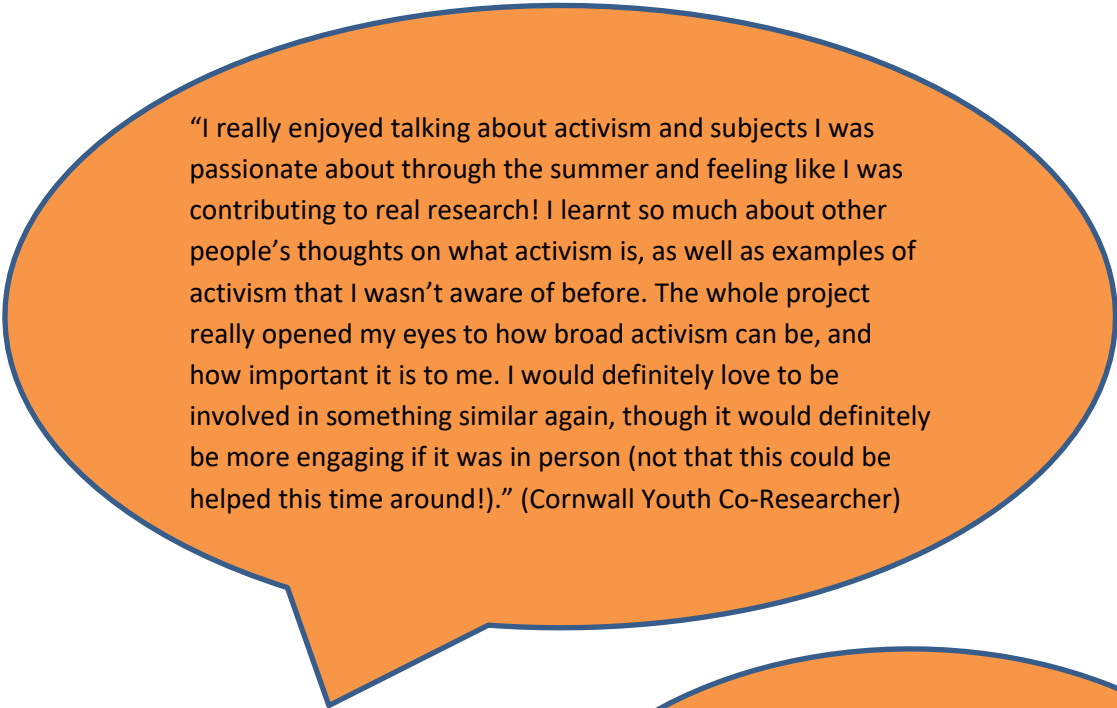
feedback provided by the youth co-researchers in Cornwall through a Menti-poll conducted in the final week and through conversations during the project:

- Young woman, aged 13
- Young woman, aged 14
- Young woman, aged 14
- Non-binary, aged 18


This report, and the analysis it contains, has been produced at Cornwall Council by:

- Natalie Russell (HeadStart Kernow Digital and Learning Lead),
- Hannah Tallis (HeadStart Kernow Engagement and Coproduction Officer)
- Hannah Dixon (Headstart Kernow Project Support Officer)

with contributions from Kate Pordage (HeadStart Schools Lead) and Charlotte Hill (HeadStart Kernow Head of Partnerships, Innovation & Wellbeing).



"I really enjoyed talking about activism and subjects I was passionate about through the summer and feeling like I was contributing to real research! I learnt so much about other people's thoughts on what activism is, as well as examples of activism that I wasn't aware of before. The whole project really opened my eyes to how broad activism can be, and how important it is to me. I would definitely love to be involved in something similar again, though it would definitely be more engaging if it was in person (not that this could be helped this time around!)." (Cornwall Youth Co-Researcher)



'I really enjoyed working on the project as it was something completely new that I hadn't been involved in before. Originally, I was slightly apprehensive about how we could make it work with it being completely online. A key thing I learned was how well you can engage with young people in an online setting and how well they took to it.'

(Cornwall Adult Co-Researcher)

# Learning

## Co-researching digitally presents new challenges

The 'Nothing About Us Without Us' project initially had a planned digital element to it. However, due to coronavirus pandemic, it moved wholly online. During to the national 'Stay at Home' mandate, Cornwall planned the project remotely with Blackpool and Newham. We gave considerable attention to identifying risks relating to information management, GDPR data protection and safeguarding. We planned how we would promote digital inclusion (access and devices) and we learned to use online collaborative tools that were initially new to both the adult and youth co-researchers.

During the sessions we used Microsoft Teams, which is a hub for team collaboration in Microsoft 365. It facilitates participation in a video conference while sharing and editing files. It has options for a Teams Space, break out rooms, chat and Whiteboard. Alongside this we used the interactive software Mentimeter (Menti) to survey the young people. Menti is an interactive presentation tool that allows participants to answer survey questions and see the results in real time. We also used Google Jamboard, which is a digital whiteboard that facilitates the sharing of ideas and sketches.

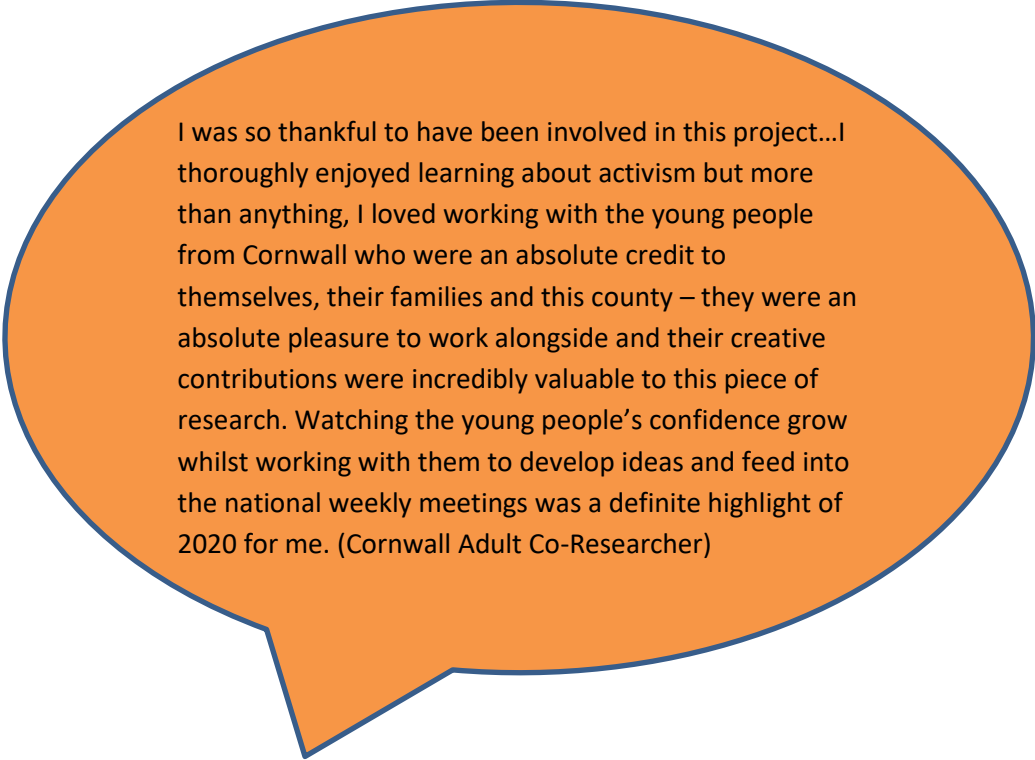
We were initially concerned about whether the youth co-researchers would have suitable equipment (a laptop) and if they would have reliable internet. We investigated the possibility of providing laptops and wifi access for the youth co-researchers that did not have them. We got permission to buy Chromebooks and were in discussion with the Legal Team to put in place agreements for the acceptable use of equipment provided. As it was, all the youth co-researchers were recruited had the equipment they needed to connect digitally.

We were concerned that the youth co-researchers may struggle with using Microsoft Teams but it quickly became very clear that they were familiar with the programme due to using it for school during the National Lockdown. One young person was not able to turn their camera on and discovered that this was because they were using their school Teams account and the feature was disabled. They were advised by another young person to create a new account and re-join the group. They were then in control of their camera. Another young person couldn't view the chat function and use the share screen function. This was fixed through adjusting administration settings.

Another initial concern was data protection. We looked at ways to allow the youth co-researchers to join Microsoft teams as an anonymised user. But this would introduce the risk that an unknown person could join and access the space. We took advice from Blackpool and asked the Cornwall youth co-researchers to create a new email address to use solely for the project (\*first name/ Headstart\*) that they could then delete afterwards. All communication went to these email addresses. This meant that their private email wasn't used and shared.

One of the advantages of co-researching digitally is the opportunity to come together from across the country and have conversations that may not otherwise

be possible. However, in the digital space, we found it is often difficult to ensure the youth co-researchers understood the topic and the activities. In the first few weeks of the project it seemed that each young person understood what was going on. However, as time went on, we found that there were a couple of occasions where some of the content and activities were not clearly understood. To address this, we offered the Cornwall youth co-researchers the opportunity to meet up as a smaller group to go through the set activities together.



I was so thankful to have been involved in this project...I thoroughly enjoyed learning about activism but more than anything, I loved working with the young people from Cornwall who were an absolute credit to themselves, their families and this county – they were an absolute pleasure to work alongside and their creative contributions were incredibly valuable to this piece of research. Watching the young people's confidence grow whilst working with them to develop ideas and feed into the national weekly meetings was a definite highlight of 2020 for me. (Cornwall Adult Co-Researcher)

The Cornwall group meetings were more informal than the larger Monday group meetings and provided the opportunity:

- for the Cornwall youth co-researchers to ask questions and discuss topics that may not have had time within the larger Monday meeting. The youth co-researchers discussed things that were more 'out of the box' and were not tied to an agenda. This led to interesting debate;
- and to talk in greater detail about activism. The youth co-researchers were often asked on the Monday to prepare something for the following week, for example 'a piece of past activism that interests you'. We offered the Cornwall youth co-researchers the opportunity to do this as a Cornwall group.

The smaller Cornwall group meetings were an important way of supporting the youth co-researchers understanding, which meant they stayed engaged in the project and ultimately enjoyed the experience.

### **Co-researching is a resource intensive activity**

There is a cost attached to effective co-researching. Consideration was given to the budget for costs such as IT equipment (as required).

We learned that effective co-researching digitally required considerable work behind the scenes to recruit and retain youth co-researchers to the project. The Cornwall team initially blocked out time in their diaries for:

- the weekly Monday sessions though July and August with Blackpool and Newham and the academics;
- a weekly reflective session for the adult co-researchers to review progress and plan future sessions (half an hour);
- an introductory meeting for the Cornwall youth co-researchers after they had been recruited. This session ran for an hour;
- and a meeting to thank the Cornwall youth co-researchers and get feedback from them about their participation in future sessions.

In addition to this, we found we needed to allocate time for:

- three weeks preparatory work to create the materials to recruit the Cornwall youth co-researchers to the project and prepare and distribute the Welcome Packs provided by Blackpool;
- a weekly local debrief meetings for the Cornwall adult co-researcher on a Tuesday morning. The notes from the meetings were used to create this case-study;
- the weekly emails and texts to Cornwall youth co-researchers to check that they are free to attend the session and to support them to connect to the Teams Space;
- and the weekly Cornwall meeting with the three Cornwall youth co-researchers to support them undertake the work to participate in the Monday sessions.

### **Recruit young people to co-research digitally if this is the chosen method. Do not assume that all young people want to engage this way**

The traditional engagement method is face-to-face. However, during the UK National Lockdown, some partner organisations saw a big 'drop off' in youth engagement and found maintaining a group of engaged young people particularly challenging.

Cornwall recruited young people onto the project as opposed to inviting young people who were already involved in face-to-face engagement in the HeadStart programme. The Advert was designed using Start Now branding.

The main advantages to recruiting young people were: we were able to recruit young people with lived experience of disadvantage who may not have previously engaged in the programme; the young people were interested in the specific project; the young people understood the amount of time required and were committed



to engage; the young people were interested in co-researching digitally.

We developed an Application Form that contained an Information Sheet. This explained what the project was about and the level of expectation of engagement. It explained who the different partners are and some of the project aims. This is important so that young people can give their informed consent to participating. The application form asks them to acknowledge that they fulfilled the recruitment criteria:

*We know some youth co-researchers routinely get missed out of these types of opportunities (including, but not exclusively, youth co-researchers with disabilities, or those on free school meals, or those from our Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities, LGBTQ communities etc) Please tick this box if you feel this applies to you.*



**Application form: Co-researcher**

Please read this information and complete the below application form if you would like to be considered and return to [headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk) by Friday 10 July 2020.

**What is this about?**

HeadStart Kernow are working with BoingBoing and University of Brighton on the engagement phase of a new research project called 'Nothing About Us Without Us' funded by the Medical Research Council and led by Professor Angie Hart. <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/civic-activism-mental-health-intervention/>

**What is a co-researcher?**

You will be helping us design research (helping us figure out the best ways to find out stuff). You will be talking about civic activism (for example campaigning for something you feel passionately about) and how this could support young people's mental health.

This may include organising and running events and telling us what you think about survey questions. And there will be lots of fun and engaging digital activities to be involved in.

**What does this involve?**

The meetings will be held over digital platforms (using Microsoft Teams). You will need to be able to attend most of the meetings. The first meeting is a 'get to know you' meeting on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July at 4pm-5pm.

There are seven meetings in total. The dates are:

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July (4pm-5pm)  
Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July (4pm-5pm)  
Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July (4pm-5pm)  
Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> August (4pm-5pm)  
Monday 10<sup>th</sup> August (4pm-5pm)  
Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August (4pm-5pm)  
Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> August (4pm-5pm)

**Who else will be there?**

The local HeadStart Kernow team is made up of 4 youth co-researchers, the HeadStart Engagement Officer and HeadStart Researcher.

When we meet with BoingBoing and the other areas there be up to eight other youth co-researchers from Newham and Blackpool and their HeadStart Facilitators and academics.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**

Being involved may help you develop research skills that may be useful in your future life. Taking part will mean you will meet new people from across Cornwall, Newham and Blackpool and will learn more about emotional resilience. Some people find engaging in this type of activity rewarding and interesting.

**What are the risks of taking part?**

There are no known risks to taking part.

**How will my data be used?**

All co-researchers will be asked to complete a consent form. Your data will then be held by HeadStart Kernow and stored securely in line with current UK data protection legislation.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You can change your mind at any time and without having to give a reason.

**Who do I speak to if I have a problem?**

Speak to Hannah Tallis (HeadStart Engagement Officer) on 07968 892 821

**Application form for Co-researcher**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
<b>Contact details</b> (email address, telephone number)	
<b>Tell us why you want to be a co-researcher</b>	

*We know some young people routinely get missed out of these types of opportunities (including, but not exclusively, young people with disabilities, or those on free school meals, or those from our Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities, LGBTQ communities etc)*

Please tick this box if you feel this applies to you ☐

Please complete this form and return to [headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:headstartyouth@cornwall.gov.uk) by Friday 10 July 2020.

We adapted the HeadStart Kernow consent form that we use for youth engagement. We inserted a box to allow the youth co-researchers to share with us anything about their emotional and/or mental health issues so that we can better support them. This was something we learned from a previous project about the importance of understanding any emotional and mental health issues of our youth volunteers.

*HeadStart is a mental health prevention programme and we are committed to supporting all youth co-researchers who may be experiencing emotional and/or mental health issues. On the basis of this, is there anything you want to share with us so that we can better support you/ the young person?*



We sent the Invitation with the Application Form to the following organisations for them to share with young people:

- Carefree works with youth co-researchers who are in and leaving care (<https://www.carefreecornwall.org.uk/>)
- Virtual School for Children in Care (<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/education-and-learning/virtual-school-for-children-in-care/>)
- WILD Young Parents' Project works with young parents in deprived areas of Cornwall (<https://www.wildproject.org.uk/>)
- youth co-researchers Cornwall (<https://www.youngpeoplecornwall.org/>)
- The Learning Partnership who delivers the Facilitator intervention for HeadStart Cornwall (<http://www.cornwall-learning-partnership.org/partners/>)
- Ambitions Cornwall (<https://www.ambitionscornwall.co.uk/>)
- Social Care teams
- Intercom Trust is a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans+ charity (<https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/>)

The application closing date was Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July and key learning from this is to push the closing date back to a Sunday (to allow more time for applications to be written over the weekend). Four youth co-researchers applied and were notified that they were successful via email and telephone. One young person subsequently decided not to continue when she found that the sessions were not for her and she struggled with connection issues. We thanked her for applying and provided her with information about other HeadStart activities that she could engage with.

### **Young people's wellbeing and safety must be prioritised throughout the project**

There is a Duty of Care when undertaking a project with young people. Even more so when the project is delivered online with young people with lived experience of disadvantage. Cornwall spent considerable time preparing how we could best support the youth co-researchers:

- we ensured the youth co-researchers had given informed opt-in consent and knew that they could leave the project at any time;
- we explained the role of the adult co-researchers in the project (as supporters and facilitators and co-research participants);
- and we asked the youth co-researchers to disclose on the consent form anything that they felt we should be aware of. We directed the youth co-researchers to their normal sources of support, if they needed it.

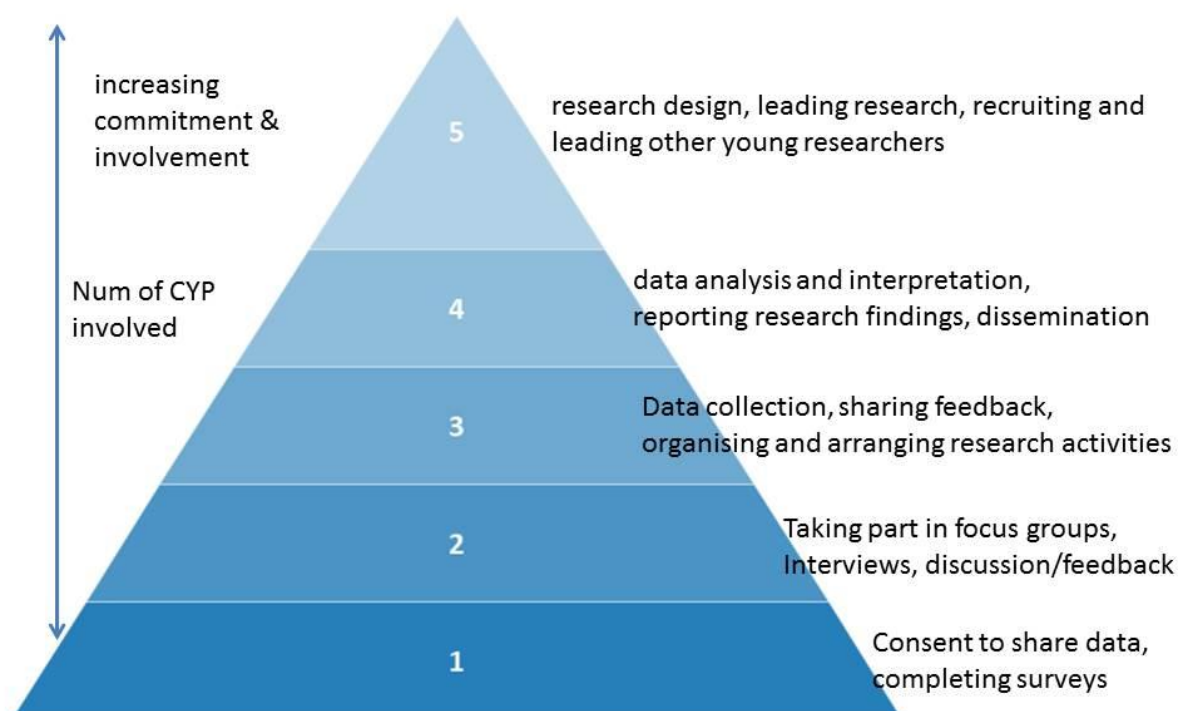
We made the decision to always have two Cornwall adult co-researchers available to support the youth co-researchers at the larger Monday meeting (one adult to participate with the youth co-researchers who had joined and a second adult to support youth co-researchers who had technical issues). Practically we found that this meant having three adults as part of the Cornwall team to allow for annual leave and other commitments over the eight week summer period.

Texts were used to communicate with youth co-researchers to check-in. If the youth co-researchers were unable to attend a session, they generally chose to communicate this via text.

## Co-production and co-researching are similar but distinctly different activities

In the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' project we engaged young people at the most resource intensive part of the 'engagement pyramid': as youth co-researchers.

### Children and young people's involvement in evaluation and research



(Reproduced with permission from Lee Atkins at the Child Outcome Research Consortium, based on the 'ladder of participation' (Roger Hart 2015))

Cornwall were in a strong position to undertake this project as co-production, digital are learning are three key strands of the HeadStart Kernow programme. The project highlighted some key differences between co-production and co-researching that became apparent.

Youth Work and research are both specialisms supported by professional principles, practices, and methods. They are distinct, but complementary, specialisms. The key difference between co-production and co-researching is seen in project development. During co-production professionals co-produce a project with young people 'from the ground up'. Co-production has 'equality of voice' as a fundamental principle. In contrast, in co-researching there are typically already defined project outcomes in place and young people are recruited against a project plan to co-produce the outcomes. Co-researching (by its nature) has more structure built into it due to the need for a research area or question, a hypothesis, and a research methodology to follow.

It was important that all the adults involved had the ability to relate to, and engage with, young people (our Engagement and Coproduction Officer has professional experience as a secondary school teacher and our researchers are experienced in community youth work). However, it became clear that the Youth Work element was of vital importance to the success of the co-researching project due to the advanced skills of the Engagement and Coproduction Officer to build rapport with young people, use accessible language, manage group dynamics, plan creative activities, support quieter youth co-researchers to contribute, and work to the individual's strengths. For this reason, the Cornwall group was decidedly Youth Work led.

### **Effective co-researching must first start with setting boundaries, confirming roles and building relationships**

One of the challenges of co-researching digitally is finding new ways of building rapport with the youth co-researchers. Normally, we would meet the youth co-researchers face to face for an icebreaker or 'get to know each other' activity before a project started. Instead, we distributed Welcome Packs produced by Blackpool, which were well received by the Cornwall youth co-researchers.

The youth co-researchers received welcome packs with materials provided by the Blackpool partnership and packaged and distributed locally. The contents included:

- Your chocolate/biscuit choice – these are for you to enjoy during our meetings.
- Felt tips
- Badges
- Post-it
- Notebook – these are for you to use as you wish.
- Stress ball
- Superhero eye masks
- Rosette task
- Book by Kajal Odedra
- Pen



Cornwall included a welcome letter from the adult co-researchers including an 'A Little Bit about us' sheet to introduce us to the youth co-researchers. This had photos of the team and a short paragraph about ourselves.

Cornwall held an introductory meeting online using Microsoft Teams to introduce the three Cornwall adult co-researchers to the youth co-researchers and give them time to get to know each other and share what they hoped to get out of participating in the project. The youth co-researchers identified any preferences they had (such as identifying as non-binary and using the 'they' pronoun) and we worked to trouble-shoot technical issues.

The Cornwall group (three adult co-researchers and four youth co-researcher) joined Blackpool and Newham and the academics from Queen's University

Belfast and University of Brighton on the Teams Space (hosted by Blackpool Council). The large number of adults and youth co-researchers on the Monday meetings made timekeeping difficult. Conversations were fluid and 'tangents' often occurred. Sessions ran over time. In later sessions we used break out rooms which led to more productive conversations.

One of the challenges we faced was in greeting the youth co-researchers as they joined the larger Monday group meetings. Normally, in face-to-face engagement, we would greet each young person as they entered the room. This was more of a challenge online where only one audible conversation can happen at a time. When people joined the session they often came in half way through a conversation and this sometimes made it difficult to welcome them and check in. We put extra effort to support our Cornwall youth-coresearcher by text.

Smaller groups work better than larger ones when co-researching digitally. There are challenges in managing large groups of people online, where only one conversation can happen at a time. In a large group there is the danger that one or two voices will dominate the conversation. Effective facilitation and chairing skills are needed to keep the group on task, to make best use of the time and to ultimately deliver project outcomes.

The Cornwall youth co-researchers told us they didn't like the conversations going off on tangents because they cared about making progress in co-researching the subject matter.

**What do you think could be improved?** START NOW

Staying focused more - we liked to go off on tangents!	sticking to an agenda	More time to get to know each other
Share the more detailed plans at the start of the project?	having a clear goal	Spend more time looking at an subject
If you do go on tangents, make sure they're relevant	using menti and jamboard more - kept us focussed.	Technical issues

### **The relational side of co-researching is important in building young people's self-esteem and confidence**

Engaging in co-researching gives young people the opportunity to work as part of a team on shared tasks. It helps young people form relationships with each other, which is particularly important for those who might otherwise be isolated or lonely. Time needs to be put aside for social time. One of the Cornwall youth co-researchers said how she enjoyed joining early for the ten minutes of social interaction before the meeting started.

We also found that some of the Cornwall youth co-researchers were quieter in the large Monday group meeting. In the smaller Cornwall group, they easily

expressed their opinion and put their cameras on. We also discovered that some of the younger participants struggled to access and understand the conversation during the Monday's group due to the pitching of the academic level and the number of people present. We supported and checked their understanding and used appropriate language, which meant they stayed engaged in the project and ultimately enjoyed the experience.

### **Effective partnerships learn together when co-researching**

The 'Nothing About Us Without Us' project had several partners, who learned together about the practical challenges of co-researching digitally. We found that:

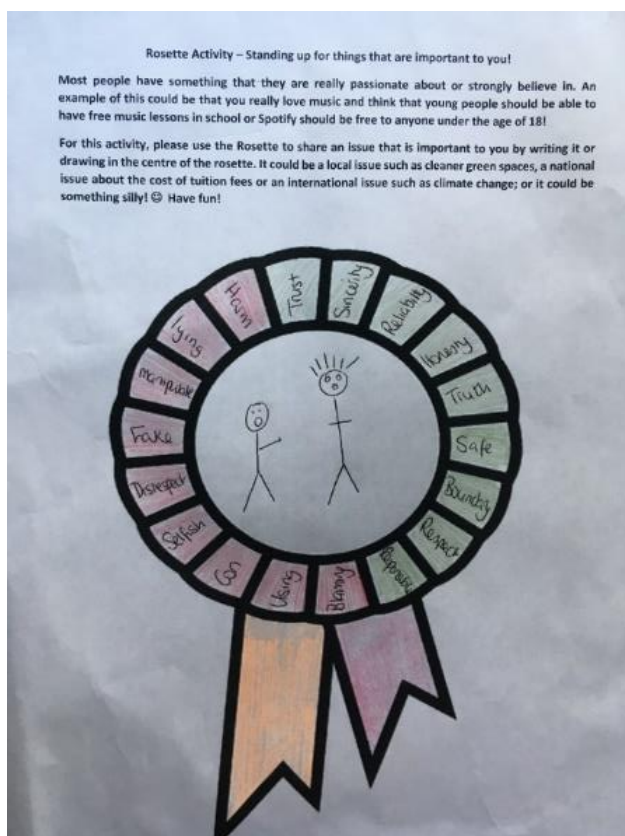
- there were a variety of views on the nature of co-researching and the different roles of the adult and youth co-researchers;
- we needed to create a shared vision among the partners for what the project is about and what the objectives are;
- there were challenges in managing the large numbers of participants. We sometimes had more adult co-researchers on the Monday session than youth co-researchers.

One of the biggest differences between Cornwall, Blackpool and Newham was that Cornwall recruited the youth co-researchers through partners in the voluntary and community sector. Blackpool and Newham did not recruit to the project but approached young people they had pre-existing relationships with. This meant Cornwall moved more cautiously than the other partners as we had limited information about the youth co-researchers who we recruited onto the project and needed to establish relationships with them.

As the project developed there was the danger that the youth co-researchers were expected to commit more time, or undertake more activities, than they initially 'signed up for'. Cornwall was conscious to protect the youth co-researchers from 'project creep' by giving them information to make informed choices about their ongoing participation.

### **Young people should benefit from engaging in co-research**

It is good practice to ask the youth co-researchers at the beginning what they want to get as personal benefits out of participating. This may be the opportunity to make friends, try new activities, and gaining experience to support applications for further education or training. It is important to take some time to plan how these expectations are going to be met during the project. And, throughout the project, check that they are being met.



(An example of a rosette, completed by a Cornwall adult co-researcher)

The youth co-researchers completed a variety of activities over the eight week period including:

- identifying what they were passionate about and strongly believed in through the design of a 'rosette';
- investigating their digital identity and online engagement through completion of a digital map;
- and learning about activism across the centuries through discussion.

More information about the project outcomes is available from the project website ([www.boingboing.org.uk/civic-activism-mental-health-intervention/](http://www.boingboing.org.uk/civic-activism-mental-health-intervention/)) and the project blog.

### Be sure to 'close the circle'

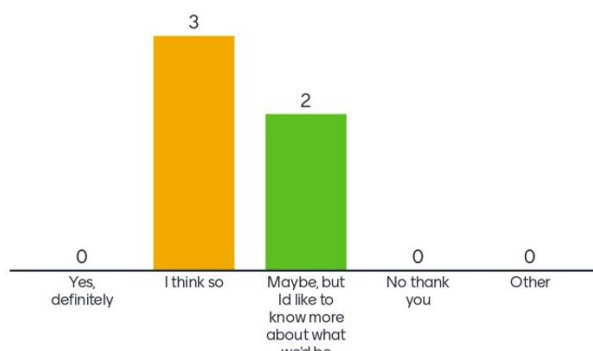
If young people have been recruited onto a co-researching project, it is essential that closure is provided. This could be in the form of thanks, a celebration activity, accreditation of learning or/and a certificate of participation. This is appreciated by the young people and increases the likelihood that they will want to participate in the next phase of the project, or a similar project, in the future.

The youth co-researchers were recruited for the 6 week project. Towards the end of that period the partners wanted to continue meeting, so an additional two meetings were arranged and the Cornwall youth co-researchers were invited to join. We were very conscious not to put the Cornwall youth co-researchers under any pressure to continue engaging beyond the end of the six week period, as they were about to return to school after a 6 month absence due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The impact of Covid-19 on their education had been significant and it was a big step for them to be back in an education establishment, especially with the additional Covid-safe restrictions and associated pressures. During the second additional meeting the youth co-researchers indicated that they were under pressure at school. It was then agreed to take a short break.

We held a Menti with the Cornwall youth co-researchers and they indicated a willingness to continue with the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' project in the future. They had a strong desire for more information about the plan going forward (e.g. the length of commitment, activities, dates, times etc).



This part of the project finishes this week with but the opportunity to continue is there - would you like to continue?



We thanked the youth co-researchers for their participation and commitment and gained consent from them to keep in contact and to invite them to the next stage in the project. We:

- telephoned the youth co-researchers and thanked for their participation. They provided feedback and gave consent to stay in contact. The preferred method of communication was by text or email;
- and sent a letter and certificate in the post to thank them formally and to reiterate that they can remove their consent to continue at any point. We provided them with a certificate to demonstrate their participation.



## Certificate of Recognition



This certificate is awarded to \_\_\_\_\_  
 for outstanding contribution in the role of Co-Researcher, representing Cornwall over a 6 week period as part of 'Nothing About Us Without Us' MRC funded research project.

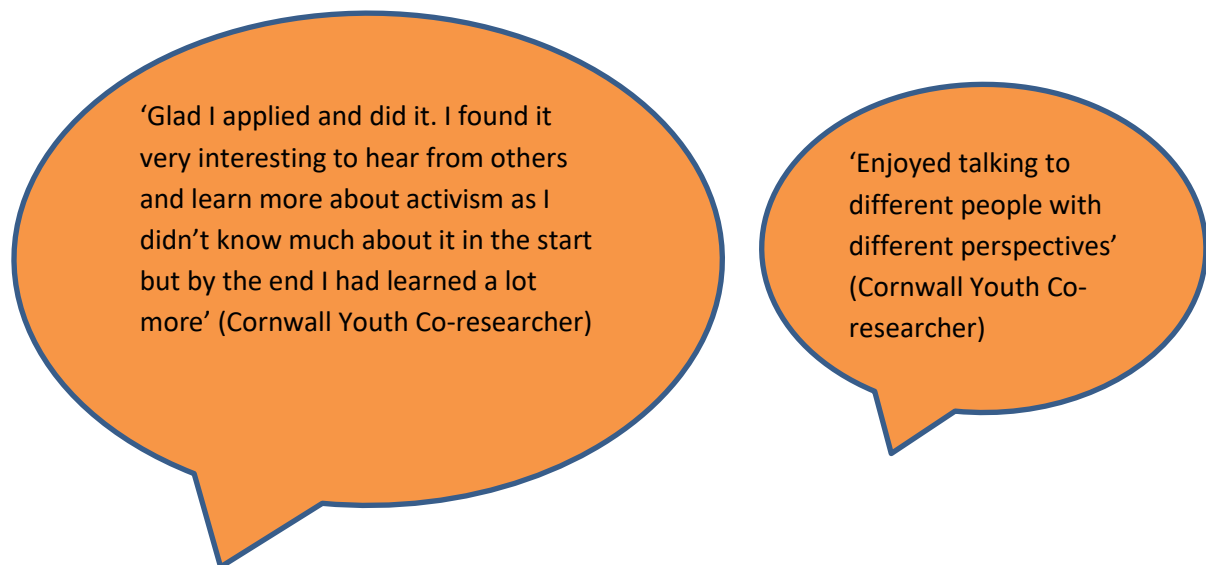
Being a co-researcher in this project has involved:

- Being proactive and taking the opportunity to have a say
- Using digital spaces to work with people across the county and two other local authority areas
- Working with academics from universities
- Being committed to the role of co-researcher and attending weekly sessions.
- Learning about different forms of activism and topics of activism

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



We provided feedback to the voluntary and community sector organisations we had recruited the youth co-researchers through. They were interested in reading the learning report.



## Summary of findings

Cornwall successfully recruited four youth co-researchers who had lived experience of disadvantage onto this project and retained three youth co-researchers throughout the eight week project period. All three stated that they would be interested in being engaged in the next phase of the project and gave consent to be kept informed about future engagement opportunities.

This case-study describes the process we followed and the lessons we learned. The key findings will be useful in the design of future projects that: seek to co-design preventative interventions with young people online; involve multiple partners with different approaches to co-research; incorporate research and youth engagement elements.

Key learning points from this case-study:

- Smaller groups of young people work better than larger ones.
- Recruit young people to co-research digitally if this is the chosen method. Do not assume that all young people want to engage this way.
- Young people's wellbeing and safety must be prioritised throughout the project.
- Co-researching is a resource intensive activity.
- Co-production and co-researching are similar but distinctly different activities.
- Effective co-researching must first start with setting boundaries, confirming roles and building relationships.
- The relational side of co-researching is important in building young people's self-esteem and confidence.
- Effective partnerships learn together when co-researching.
- Young people should benefit from engaging in co-research.
- Be sure to 'close the circle'.

## Surrounding literature on online engagement

This literature review outlines the development of engaging children and youth co-researchers as well as current uses of online engagement.

### Ethical considerations

When engaging with youth co-researchers online it is important that they understand how their data will be recorded. There has been much debate surrounding at what age children can consent and understand fully what participation means without adult supervision or intervention (O'Donnell and Strasburger, 1998). According to Moore *et al* (1998), this can be even more difficult when a child presents with additional needs such as a learning disability (also see Coad and Lewis., 2004). There is the added consideration of the issue of confidentiality and the inability to completely safeguard this (Fox *et al*, 2007). Pittenger (2003a) concludes that the risks associated with online engagement should not be more than face to face work.

### Using the internet to engage with youth co-researchers

According to Fox *et al* (2007), moving research (such as focus groups) online is in keeping with current advances of technology. It also enables us to engage with others that may not be willing to or able to engage in face to face discussion. According to Gaiser (1997), most online research has taken place through non-current time applications for example notice boards or discussion groups. There are many advantages to online discussion groups, such as not having to consider time differences, or giving space to participants that may be slow to answer. Whether this can actually be classed as a focus group has been questioned (Fox *et al*, 2007).

According to Finlay (2002), being able to reflect on what you are being asked and the opportunity to discuss this is an integral part of qualitative research. It is noted by Ginsburg and Link (1989a) that face to face focus groups can be hard for youth co-researchers due to issues such as lack of confidence, having to travel and lack of organisational skills. Zimmerman (1987) discusses that the use of using computers to engage youth co-researchers is not a new concept and has been around for some time. Successful factors for face to face focus groups have been described as "free of distraction, easy to find and relaxed" (Krueger., 1988) and it is important that this remains with online focus groups too. It has been discussed by Mann and Stewart (2000), that it is really important for online focus groups to be well moderated in order to ensure that participants are not going off topic and are being engaged. Moderation is also needed to ensure that adequate safeguarding is occurring. It is also important that the moderator remains vigilant as it may be harder to see if a participant is upset or struggling with participating (Fox *et al*, 2007).

It has been discussed by Rhodes, Bowie and Hergenrather (2003), that there are some large benefits to moving engagement online due to a reduction of cost and the ability to reach those that might not previously have been able to engage. This helps to increase the depth of the research and therefore is a good method for working with children and youth co-researchers, especially in circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Acknowledgments and thanks

This case-study focuses on the initial 8 weeks of the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' project (July – September 2020). 'Nothing About Us Without Us' is led by the Centre of Social Justice at the University of Brighton with youth co-researchers who have experienced disadvantage. The project aims to understand if activism can boost identity and sense of belonging in young people who all are too easily denied opportunities. The project is funded by the government's Strategic Priorities Fund and delivered by the Medical Research Council with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council as part of UK Research and Innovation. Project partners include the University of Brighton, Queen's University of Belfast, Blackpool Council, Cornwall Council and Newham Council.



Medical  
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Council



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Humanities  
Research Council



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council

HeadStart Kernow is part of the Together for Families directorate of Cornwall Council. We are members of the Child Outcome and Research Consortium (CORC), which collects and uses evidence to enable more effective child-centred support, services and systems to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Co-production is a key strand of the HeadStart Kernow programme.

The HeadStart Kernow programme is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HeadStart aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing. To do this, six local authority led HeadStart partnerships are working with local youth co-researchers, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and try out new Facilitator interventions that will make a difference to youth co-researcher's mental health, wellbeing and resilience. The HeadStart partnerships are in the following locations in England: Blackpool; Cornwall; Hull; Kent; Newham; Wolverhampton.

We would firstly like to thank the Cornwall youth co-researchers that applied and took part in this project. We would also like to thank the voluntary and community sector organisations in Cornwall who supported the recruitment process. We would like to thank the University of Brighton for the opportunity to join this research project with Blackpool Council and partners. It has provided us with an opportunity to explore our understanding of how to involve young people as co-researchers and add value to our Headstart Kernow work.

## Resources

### **Websites**

Boing Boing [www.boingboing.org.uk/co-producing-guide](http://www.boingboing.org.uk/co-producing-guide)

Child Outcome Research Consortium [www.corc.uk.net](http://www.corc.uk.net)

HeadStart Kernow [www.headstartkernow.org.uk/learning](http://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/learning)

StartNow [www.startnowcornwall.org.uk](http://www.startnowcornwall.org.uk)

The National Lottery Community Fund  
[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/headstart](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/headstart)

UK Research and Innovation  
[www.ukri.org/our-work/delivering-economic-impact/strategic-priorities-fund/](http://www.ukri.org/our-work/delivering-economic-impact/strategic-priorities-fund/)

Unicef [www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/)

### **Collaboration tools**

The ones used in this project were:

Google Jamboard is available at  
<https://workspace.google.com/products/jamboard>

Mentimeter is available at [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)

Microsoft Teams is available at [www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software](http://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software)

### **Guidance**

Cornwall Council's 'Effectively Working Together with Young People: Engagement and Participation Guidance' available upon request.

Cornwall Council's 'Commissioning Toolkit', in particular the 'co-design engagement plan' available at [www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/childrens-services/one-vision/projects/commissioning/commissioning-toolkit/analyse/co-design-engagement-plan/](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/childrens-services/one-vision/projects/commissioning/commissioning-toolkit/analyse/co-design-engagement-plan/)

Cornwall Council's 'Online Resilience Tool' available at  
[www.headstartkernow.org.uk/Digital/Headstart%20online%20resilience%20tool%20WebV2.pdf](http://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/Digital/Headstart%20online%20resilience%20tool%20WebV2.pdf)

Blackpool Council and Boing Boing's 'The Revolution Researchers Guide to Co-Producing Research' available at [www.boingboing.org.uk/co-producing-guide/](http://www.boingboing.org.uk/co-producing-guide/)

CORC's case-study on 'Young People's Experiences During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Views of Young HeadStart Volunteers' available at  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/a3\\_poster\\_headstart\\_young\\_people\\_coronavirus\\_updated\\_publication.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/a3_poster_headstart_young_people_coronavirus_updated_publication.pdf)

CORC's case-study on 'Engaging Children and Young People Meaningfully in Evaluation and Research: Learning from HeadStart' available at [www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/engaging\\_cyp\\_in\\_meaningful\\_research\\_learning\\_from\\_headstart.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/engaging_cyp_in_meaningful_research_learning_from_headstart.pdf)

Student Minds 'Co-producing Mental Health Strategies with Students: A Guide for the Higher Education Sector' available at [www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/cpdn\\_document\\_artwork.pdf](http://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/cpdn_document_artwork.pdf)

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## Appendix: Risk Assessment

Civic Activism Engagement Group – Risk Assessment							
This Form can be used for the assessment of all organisational risks including: Health and Safety; Risk Management & Business Continuity.							
Directorate Cornwall Council				Date of Assessment 170720			
Section HeadStart Kernow				Assessment Team Hannah Tallis, Natalie Russell, Hannah Dixon and Kate Pordage			
Location Cornwall							
Assessment Activity / Area / Type Digital Co-researching							
Do the hazards create a business continuity risk? No							
What is the Hazard	What is the Potential Harm	Who is at Risk	Controls In Place	Likelihood	Severity	Risk Rating	Further Potential Controls
Breach of data protection rules	Abuse of personal data	YP and adults in the group	YP co-researchers created email accounts for use for this project with 'firstname'HSK@gmail.com.  Data to be stored in digitally secure folder.  The group will be encouraged to use only first names.  None of the meetings will be recorded.				
YP dis-engage from the group	The project fail to reach its outcomes	UoB	Experienced individuals supporting the project Fun, engaging activities Adult supporters will develop supportive relationships outside of the group				

Disclosure		YP	All co-researchers briefed with etiquette and appropriate group behaviours for the meetings. YP co-researchers are to be supported by adult co-researchers and regularly reminded that if they have any concerns or anything they want to talk about outside of the group meetings, they can make contact with the adult co-researchers.				
YP Co-researcher failure to attend meeting		YP	If young people are not able to attend, they need to let the HSK team know by emailing, phoning or texting adult co-researchers. If youth co-researcher does not attend session and does not respond to call/message from adult co-researcher – adult co-researcher will attempt contact with parent/carer				
Adult co-researcher inability to attend meeting (leave/childcare/illness)		YP	Back up staff – 3 staff from Cornwall with 2 available each week to log on and be a contact for the youth co-researchers. Youth Co-researchers introduced to all 3 staff on Friday 17 <sup>th</sup> July so have had contact and build familiarity.				
Health and wellbeing of young people		YP	Cornwall has recruited young people onto the project – the HSK staff have no preexisting relationship with the yp. Consent forms ask about any medical (physical or emotional health) needs that we may				



			<p>need to be aware of. If emotional or physical health need are disclosed – a conversation is had with the yp to confirm who (external professional support) will be providing the support for them during the project. If the young person does not have pre-existing support, we will sign post them to support if needed. In the Introduction meeting (17<sup>th</sup> July) we will set the scope of the 'Nothing about us without us' project. This is not a research project about them as individuals – they are youth co-researchers. And our role is to support them to learn and use research skills and to be part of a wider project that is looking at civic activism and mental health. We will tell them that we are aware that some of them have preexisting professional support. They should use that support when necessary. We will tell them that to support them with engaging in the project we will have check-in conversations with the youth co-researchers after the Monday meetings to touch base. If they raise something that is a safeguarding concern we will follow Cornwall Council's safeguarding protocol.</p>				
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IT reliability		UoB	<p>Cornwall has asked if the young people have access to their own laptops and internet connection. All the four young people have provided their own. If the situation changes, we will loan them equipment.</p>				
Adult co-researchers professional identity			<p>Adult co-researchers DBS checked. Adult co-researchers will wear their Council lanyards during all meetings.</p>				
All Agreed Actions and Target Dates must be recorded on Form 2 (OH&SF 002)							