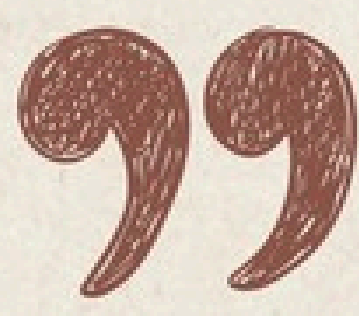


"It's about making sure real voices get heard. It's a link — between the academics and the community."



Some of us found that being a Community Researcher gave us structure, purpose, even new friendships.

"It's given me confidence. I've made friends. I feel like I've helped change something in my community."

Others found confidence, a better sense of wellbeing, and pride in seeing change happen.

"I got to know people personally. They trusted me enough to share what was going on in their lives."



"It's about capturing people's perspectives and making sure their voices are heard and respected."

"I've learned how people live, what matters to them, and how they navigate challenges. That kind of knowledge is powerful."

"We're often the bridge — the people who translate between community life and research, so that what matters locally can shape decisions."

Being a CR is also about making people feel comfortable, being respectful, and not judging others. It's about removing barriers so that different voices and experiences can be heard.

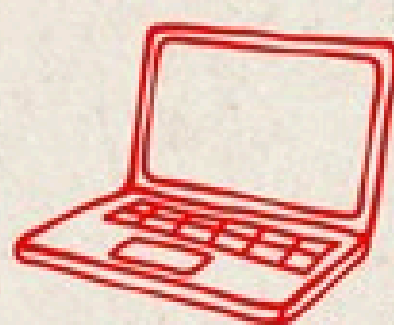
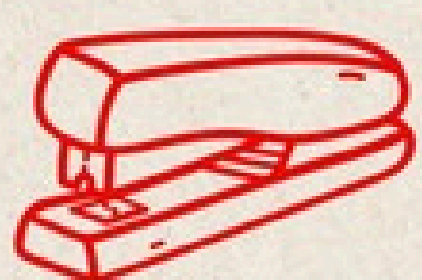
5

Case Study 8 — Tools & Practical Support That Made a Difference

Having the right tools — pens, diaries, phones, laptops, or even travel cards — was essential. It meant CRs could do the work without dipping into their own pocket.

"There should be enough budget in a project — if you don't have a phone or laptop you would struggle as a community researcher. Laptop supports independence."

Having resources in place gave CRs the freedom to focus on the research itself — and to feel respected and supported.



Plain language matters: we've learned to translate dense materials and acronyms into everyday words so more people can join in.

Co-production is slow and sometimes frustrating — and policy change takes time. But when people come back and keep engaging, it's worth it.

Training has helped — from EDI to safeguarding, boundaries, and suicide prevention. It's made us more confident, empathetic, inclusive and safer.

Structured reflective practice has helped too — jotting notes, using shared boards, or doing small check-ins builds learning over time.

We're better at managing time and tasks at hand.

"I've learned how to read data and how to listen without bias."



"I never knew how much went into research before. Now I do — and I can be part of shaping it."

"I ran a whole workshop and did a presentation in front of a room full of strangers — I'd never done anything like that before. I didn't think I could. But I did."

We learned how to support one another. To build skills and confidence. To show up. To try again. That's real learning.

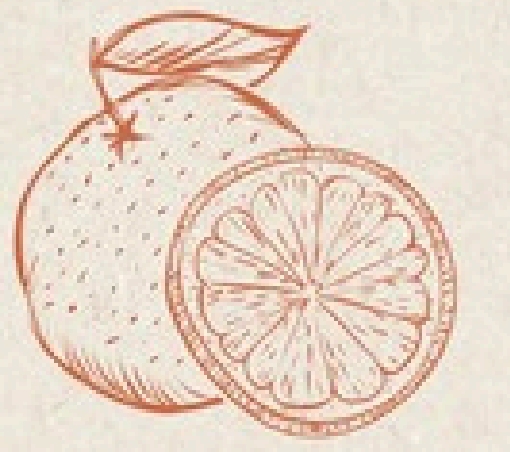
2: What even IS a Community Researcher?

It's hard to explain at first — and that's okay. A Community Researcher helps gather, understand, and share the stories and experiences of local people and ensures that the experiences and insights of everyday people shape decisions, services, and systems in their community.

That might mean:

- Talking to people in your community about their experiences
- Being non-judgmental, respectful, and making people feel comfortable to share their experiences
- Helping academics understand the local picture
- Making sure research feels real, not just theoretical
- Helping design research questions that actually make sense to people
- Running or supporting community events, workshops, or projects
- Helping to offer local and community perspectives on the data — what does the data mean?
- Communicating the results using creative methods, connecting with a range of audiences, communities and stakeholders
- Taking local action based on engagement with the community

You don't need to change who you are to be a Community Researcher. Who you are is exactly what's needed.

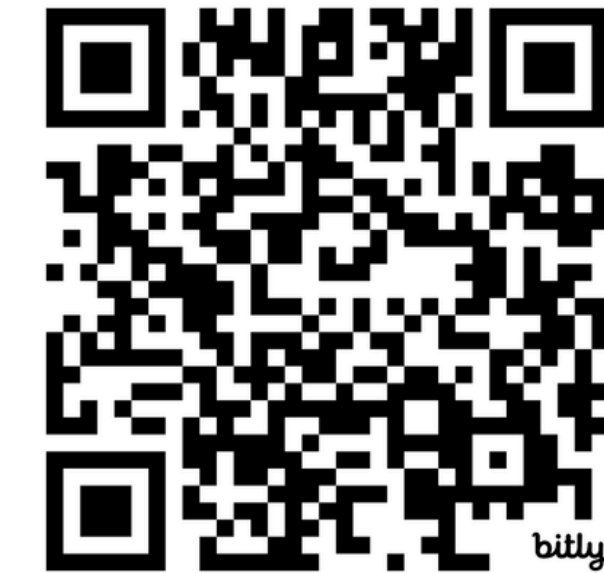


Clear, everyday communication: Turning "jargon" into plain language people can use is a real skill in this role.

The confidence to make space for quieter voices (and gently rein in the louder ones) helps everyone take part.

Knowing the local community, culture, and language makes a lot of difference.

Download the handbook: <https://zenodo.org/records/17128222>

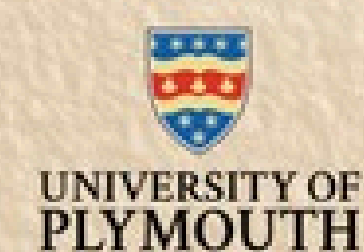
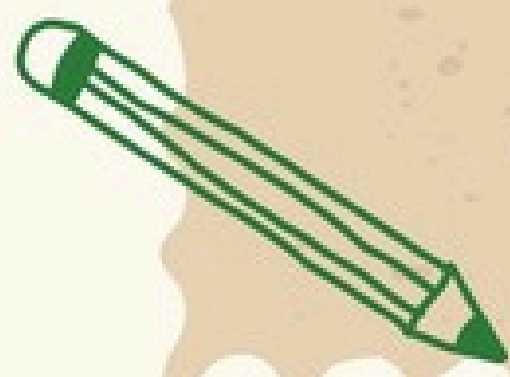


This role isn't about qualifications. It's about presence. Curiosity.



So, You're Thinking About Becoming a Community Researcher?

A working document, co-created with love, laughter, and lived experience.



THANK YOU

With thanks to the FoodSEqual Community Researchers, past and present, from Reading, Plymouth, Tower Hamlets and Brighton & Hove for sharing learning, reflections and insights.

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 Laura, Plymouth Community Food Researcher
 Star, Plymouth Community Food Researcher
 Yve, Plymouth Community Food Researcher
 Shazna Hussain, Tower Hamlets Community Researcher
 Sajna Miah, Tower Hamlets Community Researcher
 Maria, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Nikki, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Sophia, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Rachel, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Amanda, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Holly, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Cailen, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Emma, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher
 Holly, Brighton & Hove Community Researcher

Find out more about the FoodSEqual Project research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality

Handbook creation supported by Lisa Howard, Unis Nisa and many others



4: What have we learned? So much — and often and by doing, not reading.

We've learned about consent, data, and policy. Not only that, we've also learned the importance of ethics and cultural sensitivity.

Our listening skills are sharper — especially less biased listening.

We think more critically — and with more care.

We've facilitated, brainstormed, run events, and even done presentations.

Tried new facilitation methods (like mapping or imagining futures) — and learned how to manage expectations ethically.

Recruitment is relational: we've crafted quick "one-minute pitches," planned for reminders, and rolled with the fact that life happens.

"All opinions and personal experiences are valid and valued."

5: What's helped us thrive?

None of this happens in a vacuum. Behind every CR is a web of support.

What helps?

Having a team that encourages you

Supportive coordinators who hold space and care

Knowing the purpose of the research; what are you trying to achieve, what information you want

A healthy balance — respecting that CRs and researchers both have jobs, families, and lives

Regular check-ins — even short ones — and a bit of weekly structure for reading, writing, and debriefing kept us steady

Cross-site meet-ups were energising — sharing approaches and small wins made us feel part of something bigger

Playing to each other's strengths on outputs (some writing, some visuals, some facilitation) made the work better — and kinder

Flexing with team changes and pivots is normal — good communication helps us adapt.