

***'The whole team is there to encourage everyone to be themselves'***  
***– Rick Pataky***



***Rick is Public Involvement Lead for the NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration Medway (HDRC) and a member of CHSS Opening Doors to Research group. He talks about his personal journey of public involvement – and why he loves being part of research!***

***How did you become involved in CHSS research?***

I first met CHSS colleagues when I joined the NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration in Medway as Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement lead. I got to learn about CHSS and the Opening Doors to Research Group and it sounded really interesting, so I decided to get involved in that too! I've been with the group for a couple of years now.

***what do you particularly enjoy about being part of research?***

For me, it's all about learning, and connecting with other people. As a member of the public I love feeling involved in a group research environment. It's really good to learn from others, hear people's stories and feel involved as an equal.

***What activities do you get involved in - tell me more about what you do in Opening Doors?***

Within Opening Doors my role is mainly as a listener. We usually have presentations from CHSS researchers about their new projects. The Opening Doors group can advise them on research design and questions for different projects that are coming up or are in progress. They really appreciate the feedback from the public. I've brought a couple of other people into the group and a bit of diversity, and hopefully in the future I'll be involved in some of my own projects.

Something I've especially enjoyed is getting involved in helping to deliver Public Involvement training sessions for students, supported by Amanda Bates. Being able to put my point of view as a 'public voice' has gone down really well, with lots of eager questions and feedback.

***What are the main challenges you have faced in your involvement work?***

Sometimes you are faced with acronyms - jargon and terminology – lots! So you have to pipe up and say what the hell is that?! You need to ask what is going on. With regard to other challenges, I find that there is sometimes a difference in language between especially where I am at the moment, host organisations, so one organisation might have this definition of research whereas this one will have a different definition of research. I think that can be confusing and very challenging.

### **Why do you think researchers should involve public and patients in their research?**

Researchers should absolutely involve them, because the public are the ones that ultimately benefit. The public are the ones with the knowledge of local providers, local services – just everything local – their local community. As I said, if you have academia telling you what you should be doing with your illness, with your community, with your health, you're just not going to listen.

If you've got someone who's got lived experience then people are more likely to think '*you're on my side, you know what I'm talking about, you're on my wavelength*'.

### **What do you feel that CHSS offers You?**

Amanda and the team are brilliant at keeping in contact. If you have any issues, queries, problems, go to them and they answer almost immediately – if not, the next day or something. Training is given all the time - not academic training, it's not 'this is going to be above my head', - it's stuff I know, even if I didn't think I knew it! Training is not just a tick box exercise. I think the whole team is there to encourage everyone to be themselves really, and it is not a 'bums on seats' group!

### **What would you say to anyone thinking of getting involved in research?**

I think everyone should give it a go. Especially if you're a people person or you are into giving. Maybe you've received a lot from your local community or have got a wealth of knowledge. Knowledge isn't always academia! If you've got lived experience sometimes that knowledge is more useful than academic knowledge. You don't need a medical background either – just a thirst to be involved. Give it a try!

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