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Working with young disabled people

[Living Life to the Fullest](#) has given children and young people with 'life-limiting' or 'life-threatening' impairments opportunities to 'speak about their lives in "new" ways: as joyful, creative, fun, challenging, but ultimately liveable, just like anyone else'. [1] Dr Kirsty Liddiard of the School of Education explains how open research has been central to this ESRC-funded project.

One of the main aims of Living Life to the Fullest was to enable disabled children and young people to tell their own stories through engagement with the arts. To achieve this, we established a Co-Researcher Collective made up of young disabled people who co-led the inquiry with us. This meant that the project was grounded in academic and social openness, ensuring the research was accessible to everyone involved, from co-researchers, participants and their families to allies and community partner organisations.

Applying open research in disability studies

We undertook a number of public engagement and knowledge translation activities, including conferences and research festivals, both in person and online. Sharing our research outside of the project proved beneficial not only to young disabled people but also to organisations and employers. This was demonstrated by an event to which we invited Youth Employment UK (YEUK), a leading organisation working to change the youth employment landscape. Our co-researchers took the opportunity to share their insights on how employers can better support young disabled people, and as a result YEUK recognised the need to revise their resources for young people and also for employers to be more inclusive of young disabled people. We subsequently worked with YEUK to develop a [webinar](#) and written [guide for employers](#), both of which were shared with over 700 organisations.

With the help of ESRC Festival of Social Sciences funding, we hosted several successful events in Sheffield, and we have had the opportunity to reach regional and national audiences through contributions to BBC television and radio. We were also delighted to commission a public art installation by [Louise Atkinson](#) and to support participants in submitting their artwork to the [Rightfullives](#) online art exhibition.

Other activities promoting open research included our work with Canine Partners, a registered charity that transforms the lives of disabled people through assistance dogs. Following further exploration of our early findings, we contributed to the [Canine Care Project](#), which featured a [report](#) and a professionally [animated film](#) that are openly available and fully accessible to disabled young people and their families.

"Our desire for research to be an open process means creating a fully accessible process - from design to dissemination. Our work is based on the simple premise that you can't do high quality research about disability and youth without including young disabled people across the process. By extension, then, for us, meaningfully open research is not a process about or for disabled children and young people, but conducted with and by them."



Why Can't We Dream is a collection of freely available online resources, including a Co-production Toolkit showing how academics, organisations and young disabled people can successfully work together on an arts-informed research project.

Looking to the future

In addition to sharing the results of our research, our open research culture motivated us to share our unique ways of working with others. [Why Can't We Dream?](#) is an online collection of freely available, downloadable resources co-designed and built with our research partners. These include a Co-production Toolkit showing how a diverse team of academics, organisations and young disabled people can successfully carry out a co-produced, arts-informed research project. The toolkit provides a range of resources for researchers, charities, non-profit organisations and schools wishing to work in co-production with marginalised young people. Offering podcasts, films and lesson plans, the toolkit has already been adopted by a number of organisations around the UK, and we hope that our culture of open research will lead to more exciting projects and opportunities for young people in the future.

Our open research

- Research processes and findings shared via videos, blog and social media
- Openly available online toolkit created for organisations working with young disabled people
- Open and transparent collaboration with young disabled people and partner organisations

References

- [1] Living Life to the Fullest. [Website] <https://livinglifetothefullest.org/about/>
- [2] Goodley, D. et al., (2017). Feeling disability: theories of affect and critical disability studies. *Disability and Society*, 33(2), 197-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1402752>
- [3] Goodley, D. et al., (2015). The DisHuman child. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(5), 770-785. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075731>