



LEARNING THROUGH INVOLVEMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM A RESEARCH INTERNSHIP

Holly Graham, Children's Occupational Therapist, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Email: holly.graham@nhct.nhs.uk

 [Holly Graham](#)



BACKGROUND

Children's Occupational Therapy services are increasingly expected to embed meaningful involvement of children, young people and families in service improvement. My internship focused on understanding how to design involvement that is accessible, ethical and genuinely influential. Working within a busy clinical service gave me space to step back from day-to-day pressures and reflect on how involvement work is planned, supported and governed. The internship helped me understand the practical and ethical considerations involved in creating meaningful opportunities for children and young people to share their views.

AIM

To explore how children and young people can shape service improvement in a way that is safe, inclusive and aligned with NHS governance requirements.

APPROACH

- Establishing the foundations of a new PPIE group for children and young people, considering recruitment, safeguarding and accessibility.
- Developing a clearer understanding of consent and assent, and how to support children to make informed choices about participation.
- Using the Lundy Model of Participation to think about how to create the right conditions for children to express their views.
- Exploring creative and flexible involvement methods through talks, training and discussions with mentors.
- Mapping the distinctions between research, audit, service evaluation and PPIE, and adapting my project as my understanding of governance developed.
- Building a small network of supervisors, mentors and early-career researchers to support reflective thinking and project development.

KEY LEARNING

- How to design involvement from the ground up, considering accessibility, safeguarding and the practicalities of working with children and young people.
- How governance requirements shape what is possible, and why choosing the right methodological route matters.
- The value of protected time for reflection, learning and stepping back from clinical pressures.
- How involvement work can clarify thinking, reveal gaps in current processes and strengthen future project planning.
- The importance of supportive supervision and mentorship in developing research and service-improvement skills.

IMPACT ON PRACTICE

- I have advocated for, designed and now supervise a service improvement post within the internal Band 6 rotation.
- I have begun to consider how involvement approaches could be used more routinely within Children's OT to understand unmet needs and shape service development.
- I feel more confident navigating governance, planning involvement activities and supporting colleagues to think about participation in their own work.
- The experience has strengthened my understanding of how different parts of a study fit together and how involvement can support wider service priorities.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Embedding involvement approaches more consistently within Children's OT practice.
- Supporting colleagues to develop confidence in using involvement methods.
- Continuing to build relationships with supervisors, mentors and early-career researchers to shape future projects.
- Developing involvement activities that help identify unmet needs and guide service evolution.
- Building on my interest in roles that combine clinical practice, development work and collaborative problem-solving.
- Using the clarity gained through this internship to shape my longer-term career direction.

CONCLUSION

This internship strengthened my understanding of how involvement, governance and research processes intersect in Children's Occupational Therapy. It helped me develop the skills and confidence needed to plan involvement activities, navigate methodological decisions and think more critically about how services evolve. Overall, the experience clarified my professional direction and highlighted the value of protected time, reflective practice and collaborative supervision in enabling meaningful involvement work.

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