

WMTD Manual for Peer Researchers for Personal Advisers

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**what makes the
difference**


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children's
bureau

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General

1. Overview of role of WMTD peer researchers

Research is a process of discovery and a way of enhancing existing knowledge, understanding and skills. It is used to discover answers to questions and gather reliable knowledge. Research is distinct from just trying to find something out because it involves:

- Systematically gathering information as widely as possible
- Looking at what the information tells you and
- Informing decision-making processes as a result.

If research is to be used to influence policy and practice, or expand what is known about a subject, it is essential that it is carried out in an objective, systematic way, so that the findings can be relied on as a true reflection of reality. Researchers use a wide variety of methods to collect information. The type of method chosen depends on such things as what is being studied, the people involved and the purpose of the research.

In this WMTD piece of research we are using questionnaires / “structured interviews” to gather the views of young people across the country who have experience of care services, to find out about some of their experiences of the care system and what helped them or not. What is distinctive is that most of the research will be conducted by their peers, namely you, rather than by professional researchers. It is hoped that this will help interviewees feel more relaxed and open, as well as providing you with useful training and experience for the future.

Interviewing can be interesting and fun. The guidelines in this manual together with the training are intended to make it easier and safe for you as well as ensure that all the interviews are conducted in the same way across the country, so that the information collected can be compared and used to influence policy.

What is expected of you as a peer researcher:

- Ensure your own and your interviewee’s safety
- Contact young people who have agreed to take part
- Ask them if they are still willing to be interviewed
- Arrange an interview time and place with each person
- Carry out your interview
- Check you have recorded what is said accurately
- Return completed questionnaires to WMTD
- Fill in time sheets and carry out other necessary administration
- Take part in debriefing sessions

Role of Personal Advisers

- Supporting your interviewer to conduct their research
- Ensuring they are safe
- Ensuring the guidelines on confidentiality and anonymity are followed

2. Looking after your own and your interviewee's safety and well being

While we do not want you to be unnecessarily alarmed, it is essential that you look after your own and your interviewees' safety and well-being. After all you both may be going to unfamiliar places and meeting people you don't know.

*Golden rule:
If you are feeling unsafe in a situation, try to get out of it as simply
and calmly as you can*

It is impossible to cover every possible event. But the following examples may arise and could pose a potential risk for either, or both, you the interviewer and your interviewees. So we have set out some simple solutions for you to consider in advance and so help you plan ways to reduce any risks.

You may think of more situations and other issues may arise as you go along. If so discuss these and how you can best deal with them with your Personal Adviser and if necessary with WMTD as well.

Safety issues for you the interviewer

The work you are doing is very important for WMTD. However we do not want you to be placed in any danger because of it. We are hoping that most interviews can take place in the Leaving Care service or another local authority building to minimise the risk to you and your interviewee. However you should consider the following, especially if you have to travel and interview people in places you do not know.

| Potential risk | How to minimise |
|--|--|
| Travelling | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Arrange the interview venue to minimise travelling▪ Use public transport▪ Familiarise yourself with the route▪ Take a PA with you to the venue |
| Going to areas you do not know | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Arrange interviews in places you know▪ Get a map of the area – eg from your PA or off the internet▪ Arrange interviews in daylight hours |
| Interviewing people in private houses | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Avoid unless impossible to do so▪ Inform your PA of the address you are going to, expected start and finishing times, etc▪ Arrange to ring your PA when going into and finishing an interview, and for them to ring you within a certain time to check that everything is ok▪ Ring your PA on going in and ending the interview▪ If you do not have a phone make another arrangement to meet with or contact your PA at a certain time to say that the interview has finished and that you are alright▪ If you feel unsafe make some apology and leave calmly – rearrange the interview if necessary▪ Discuss what to do in an emergency with your PA – eg if you have not rung by the arranged time |
| Carrying money/ vouchers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Don't tell others that you have money/vouchers on you▪ Only carry the minimum amount |
| Distress | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The issues you discuss during these interviews may spark off some unpleasant memories and feelings for you▪ Arrange a time to discuss these with your PA |
| Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Whilst protecting confidentiality, PAs can access the database to check if there is any history of personal violence and if so could advise or discuss with the peer researchers any extra precautions that seem justified.▪ If feeling threatened the young person should be advised to politely and calmly leave |

Safety issues for interviewees

| Potential risk | How to minimise |
|--|---|
| Travelling | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Arrange the interview to minimise travelling▪ Ensure the venue is easily accessible by public transport▪ Invite them to bring a PA with them to the venue▪ When the interview is finished check they know the way home▪ If need be provide directions/ maps or ask your PA to help |
| Going to areas they do not know | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Arrange interviews in places interviewees know▪ Arrange interviews in daylight hours▪ Send a map or advise them re getting one off the internet▪ Offer to interview them somewhere more convenient for them – but balance this with your own safety needs |
| You | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Carry and show your identity badge to confirm who you are▪ Try to conduct interviews in quiet but semi-public places, avoiding the need to be alone▪ Provide information about the research and a number to contact at WMTD if they have any concerns/queries▪ If they don't want to let you in ask them if there is somewhere else you can meet to do the interview▪ If they don't want to continue with the interview tell them that that is ok and leave, providing them with the usual leaflets as well as a voucher if you have done some of the interview |
| Distress | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ These interviews may trigger upsetting feelings for your interviewee.▪ Acknowledge these and let the young person have some time out if they need to, as well as the chance to talk a bit more afterwards▪ Recommend that they discuss these issues afterwards, with someone they trust such as their PA▪ Perhaps mention that they were upset to your own PA (without breaching confidentiality) |

3. Ensuring an ethical and professional approach

Equal opportunities

Every young person in care and care leavers should be given an equal opportunity to participate in this research and give their views. It is essential that everything is done to ensure that the views of young people who are often not asked for their views, such as disabled and minority ethnic young people, are included.

Informed consent

Taking part in these interviews is totally voluntary.

The young people who have already said they might be interested must be given full information about this research and what is involved in these interviews before they decide whether to participate or not.

Even if they agreed initially they can change their minds at any time. So giving and gaining consent is a continuous process, you may need to recheck with interviewees over the course of the interview if they are happy to continue as well as watch out for signs that they are uncomfortable or uneasy. Or there may be some individual questions which some people prefer not to answer: that is fine, just move on to the next question.

If someone refuses to take part, or does not want to answer some of the questions, reassure them that that is ok and within their rights and try to make sure they don't feel bad about it.

Protecting confidentiality

Interviewees have agreed to be interviewed they have not agreed to anything else. Legally no-one has a right to store or use someone's name, address, or phone number, care status, etc without their permission.

As part of this study you will be given a list of young people's names, telephone numbers and possibly addresses. During your interviews they will provide you with other private details.

- Do not share your interviewee's name, address, or any other details with anyone else
- Do not use them for anything else besides this research
- Keep your interviewees' names and details in a separate place to your completed questionnaires
- When your interviews are over destroy your lists in a safe way, eg tear them up, or shred them.

It is equally essential that you are safe. So if you are visiting a young person in a private house, or hostel, or an area you don't know well, it is safer and acceptable that you inform your Personal Adviser of where you are going, or ask them to go with you (although not to come into the actual interview) - see more on safety below.

Breaking confidentiality for example for child protection

There are some occasions where it is in the best interest of the interviewee that confidentiality is broken. For example if your interviewee tells you that they are being physically, or sexually abused, or seem at risk from some other serious harm then it is important that you pass on that information rather than keeping it private.

If this situation arises you should:

- Ask them if they have informed anyone else and if so who and what the person has done
- If they have told their Personal Adviser or another worker you probably don't need to do anything, but if they have only shared it with friends you should follow the next few steps
- Tell your interviewee that you cannot keep this a secret and that you need to discuss this with your Personal Adviser
- Speak to your Personal Adviser and discuss with them what to do next
- Keep detailed notes of what is said and done

Do not:

- Tell people who do not need to know
- Inform the person who your interviewee is complaining about
- Promise the young person to keep this a secret
- Put words into your interviewee's mouth – as it may prejudice later evidence gathering
- Provide counselling or advice to the young person

Preparation beforehand

- Discuss your Local Authority's Child Protection / Safe-Guarding Children policies and essential procedures with your Personal Adviser
- Discuss with your Personal Adviser what to do in such a situation
- Have emergency numbers to hand, eg ChildLine, NSPCC, Social Services
- Provide your interviewees with leaflets, which explain the confidentiality policy and the limits to it.

Privacy

Other details about the interviewee may be interesting, however they have a right to privacy. Interviewing someone about their experiences in care or leaving care does not give you automatic rights to ask about other issues that take your fancy. However this does not stop you having a brief, friendly chat before or after the interview.

Responses and views should be kept anonymous

It is important for a number of reasons that no-one is named and that no-one can know when reading a report who has said what. If interviewees do not trust this and feel worried that what they say will be traced back to them, they may not tell you things that are important to the research.

Tips to help ensure anonymity:

- Do not put interviewees' names on their questionnaires
- Make sure the list of names you are using cannot be linked to the completed questionnaires
- Store your list of names and completed questionnaires separately
- Do not name people in the answers, eg if the interviewee talks about a particular worker, write down that worker's job title rather than their name.

Respect

We hope that as wide a range of people as possible will agree to be interviewed. Therefore although you may have some things in common you may also notice many differences such as background, life experiences, lifestyle and opinions. It is essential to show respect to your interviewees. This can be achieved in a number of ways, for instance:

- Treat everyone equally
- Be polite to everyone
- Accept interviewee's views, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with them. This is also crucial to avoiding bias within the interview.
- Avoid judgements on the basis of appearance, etc
- Avoid swearing, etc

4. Using your PA & WMTD

While we have tried to cover as much as possible in the training and this manual, other issues may well arise as you go along. If so please raise these with your PA and if you are still not sure or just want to discuss it further contact us at WMTD.

The names and phone numbers are:

Sharn: 020 7840 5620; 07725 957284

Ernestina: 07739 511253

Modi: 07786172735

Chantelle: 07734022410

Keep these numbers handy while you are out and about

If young people phone us we will phone you back to save costs. Young people can also reverse charges if you have to phone from your mobile.

Role of Personal Advisers

- Discuss potential child protection issues with interviewers before they start interviewing
- Make a plan of what to do in the event that anything arises
- Discuss with your interviewer ways to ensure their own and the and interviewees' safety and well-being
- Arrange times to meet with interviewers to discuss general and personal issues which have come up as a result of the interviewing

If you are worried about anything discuss this with your supervisor and/or with WMTD

Arranging interviews

1. Making first contact

You will be given the contact details (names and phone numbers) of young people who have previously said that they are happy to take part in this research.

PA's and peer researchers can ask other young people if they would like to take part. If so consent forms need to be signed by the young person giving permission to to be contacted about this.

Your job will be to contact them to see if they are still willing to participate, explain what is involved and arrange your interview time and place.

2. Gaining consent to be interviewed

Taking part in the interviews is totally voluntary.

The person must understand what is involved in order to be able to give valid consent. For example they need to be told and understand:

- Who is doing this research
- Why it is being done
- How long an interview will take and any other practical considerations, eg timing, location, travelling
- What will happen to their interview – who will see it, etc
- What will happen to the findings, what will they be used for
- What's in it for them

3. Arranging your interviews

- If your prospective interviewee is happy to proceed, arrange your interview time and place – remember the safety issues outlined above.
- Allow approximately 45 - 60 minutes for the interview itself and another 10 -15 minutes for a brief chat and practical arrangements at the start and finish.
- Allow enough time to get from one interview to another plus some extra time in case there are delays.
- Provide your Personal Adviser with a back-up list of who you are interviewing and where, which they also need to keep private.

Role of Personal Advisers

- Check how people are getting on with arranging interviews
- Discuss any issues or difficulties
- Get a back-up list of where young people are going and discuss transport and safety precautions with them as appropriate

Telephone script:

Hi, my name is X, (if they sound confused point out they don't know you, ...)

- I am ringing about the What Makes The Difference research.
- I was given your name and number by What Makes the difference because you said that you are willing to be interviewed for this.
- *Check to see if they remember*
- I do not want to interview you now, but if you are still happy to I would like to arrange a time and place for us to meet to do the interview.
- I will ask you a set list of questions that we are asking everyone.
- It will take between 45 minutes and an hour.
- Everything you say will be anonymous – in other words no-one will know who has said what, and no-one will be identified in the report.
- I only have your name and phone number and will only use them to set up these interviews. Once the interviews are over I will destroy this list.
- Have you any questions? *(if so answer these)*
- Are you still happy to go ahead? – (if so can we arrange a time & place)
- We are giving everyone who takes part a £15 voucher which you can use in a number of high street shops, as a small thank-you for your time

Stuff about WMTD: *Would you like me to explain a little more about this research?*

→If so: What Makes a difference is a 2- year project, funded by the European Union which is trying to improve the services that local councils give young people leaving care.

There are a lot of activities going on in this project. One of them is this research: care leavers, such as myself, have been employed as researchers to interview other young people who are in care, or who have left care, to gather your views about services.

When all the interviews are done and analysed a report will be written which will be used to help improve local services.

Then arrange interview time and place

- Agree somewhere that is safe for both of you
 - Promise to show them your identity badge when you meet
- Provide your telephone number in case they need to contact you in emergency – but don't make it sound too easy to rearrange

Conducting the interview

1. Doing your interview

Check list for things to have with you for your interviews:

- Your interviewee's name
- Their phone number – to ring in case you are late
- The address where you are meeting
- A map showing where you are meeting unless you know it well
- Your identity badge
- Pens
- Blank questionnaires + cards
- Information leaflets about WMTD and this research
- Consent forms
- Vouchers
- Receipt slips for vouchers
- Your Personal Adviser's phone number
- A packet of tissues!

Put your interviewee at ease

While doing the interviews may seem like a stressful experience to you, it will be even more so for your interviewee. After all you understand what it is all about, the questions you will ask etc: but they don't.

When you first meet, remember to smile and be friendly, try to put them at ease and offer to explain the research again.

Body language and communication

Body language is extremely important when you are interviewing. Only a small proportion of what you communicate is through what you say, the rest is communicated through your body language and voice. Even if you are interested, if your body is indicating that you are thinking about something else it shows and can put your interviewee off.

A few simple tips

- Smile, especially when you first meet
- Breathe! and relax
- Concentrate on what the person is saying
- Keep an 'open' posture – eg legs uncrossed, arms unfolded
- Sit square to the person
- Use eye contact – but don't stare or overuse it as that can be intrusive

- Speak clearly and neither too loudly or quietly
- Keep an even pace – neither too fast nor too slow
- Make interested sounds and expressions – but don't agree or express opinions as that may influence what they say
- Take care which parts of the question you emphasise

Asking the questions

- Everyone will be using the same standard questionnaire - 'interview schedule'.

- It is very important that the questions are the same across the country, so that we can compare the answers. So please ask the questions as they are written and as instructed in the training.

- However if your interviewee does not understand the question you can explain what it is about and then ask it, as worded, again.

- The questions are worded to be neutral: try to ensure that you do not suggest there is an expected or 'right' answer by the way you ask it.

- Equally we need the interviewee's opinions – not yours, so try to remain as neutral as you can, without giving hints about your opinion. This is a difficult balance to strike – ie showing that you are interested in what they say, but without suggesting that there is an answer that you prefer or agree with.

- If someone does not want to answer a particular question, say that is fine and move on to the next one. You can gently check at the end if they have changed their mind. But if they don't want to answer something, make it clear that that is perfectly acceptable.

- Equally if you notice that your interviewee is getting uncomfortable around a particular set of questions, ask them if they are happy to proceed.

- If you are not sure what a person means in their answer you can ask them to explain it a bit further.

3. Using the *WMTD* questionnaire

The WMTD questionnaire contains almost 60 questions, which are aimed to find out about young people's experiences as well as what, in their opinion, can make things better.

The questions have been developed by WMTD and NCB and aim to cover the key WMTD work areas – ie preparation & planning, empowerment, education, training and employment as well as other important issues such as health.

Although we all want to ask a million questions, these issues can be very emotionally upsetting and tiring to discuss. So the questionnaire is as short as we could make it. It should take about 40 /45 minutes. But it may need to be reduced further if it takes much longer. We will test this in the initial pilot.

As you will notice the questionnaire is split into a number of different sections:

- initial questions help warm up and get into the swing of it
- and then go on to asking where your interviewee is living
- questions to check what support people have had in preparing for leaving care and living independently
- more detailed questions about the care and support they have received and how satisfied they are with what they have got
- questions about education or training or employment and what help they have received around this
- some very basic questions about health to see if they have a doctor etc and if they know where to get some essential advice
- and last but not least a general section, including a place for people to say what ethnicity category they use for themselves.

Recording the answers given

- All of the questions have instructions with them – and more are added on the sample questionnaire given to you. Please fill in as instructed and write as neatly as you can, as someone else will be reading it later.
- Most questions have a selection of answers to choose from – which you will need to tick or circle etc. This is deliberate to make it easier to compare all the answers given across the whole country.
- Some of these closed questions use cue cards – where you show the interviewee a list of potential answers and they give you a number of the answer they prefer, which you tick or circle etc. If the person has difficulty reading these cue cards you will need to read them clearly to them.
- If you are unclear what the interviewee is saying ask them to repeat their answer or to explain it a little.
- However we know that every individual is different. So many of the 'closed', tick-box, questions have a box, where you can write any additional comments an interviewee makes. However you are not

expected to probe and ask lots of extra questions to fill these boxes, instead just write down whatever explanatory comments people make. Use “quotation marks” if you manage to write down the exact words they use.

- A few questions are ‘open’ eg where you are asking what the young person feels about something. Write their answers in the box provided – or use some empty paper if there is not enough room. Try to write what is said as closely as possible to their own words. If it is in their own words, or parts are, use “quotation marks” around that sentence or phrase.

4. *At the end of your interview*

- Ask if there is anything else they would like to add.
- Check that you have answers to all the questions they have answered – quickly skim to make sure you have not missed a group of questions
- Read over your completed interview schedule to make sure that the answers you have written are clear and easy to read
- Put your name, area and date of interview on the completed questionnaire
- Put the completed questionnaire in your envelope, which will be sent to WMTD
- Give your interviewee a voucher
- Ask them to sign the receipt form for the voucher, and explain that this is required by the funders (European Social Fund and WMTD) to ensure that the vouchers are being given to interviewees
- Put the signed receipts in a different folder or envelope – showing that names are not kept with their questionnaires
- Given them a thank-you note, which gives further contact details about WMTD if they want more information about the research and also if they want to ask for more independent advice or information about their care situation.
- If they feel upset after the interview stay a little while and chat if you like. However it is very important that you ensure that they will talk to someone else about this. Try to encourage your interviewee to talk to someone they trust and like, ideally their personal adviser, but if not someone else.

5. Administration after your interview

- Return your completed questionnaires to WMTD one at a time
- Stamped addressed envelopes will be provided by WMTD – so you will not need to pay postage.
- Make sure that the envelope is sealed so that no-one else reads the questionnaire
- Discuss any issues arising with your Personal Adviser and if you feel necessary with Sharn and/or Ernestina at WMTD
- Complete your time sheets and give them to your PA who will send them on to WMTD
- Return your completed voucher receipts to WMTD – separately in another stamped addressed envelope.
- Record the name and telephone number of your interviewee and the date of your interview in a separate place. Keep this safe and private. When you have completed all your interviews send this list to WMTD as we will be doing some quality control of the interviews.

6. Other issues after the interview

You may find that these interviews trigger some difficult feelings for you. We strongly suggest that you try to talk to someone else about these – either your Personal Adviser or someone else you can talk to and trust. However, try not to give the identity and/or private information about an individual interviewee, unless of course you are concerned about their welfare.

Role of Personal Advisers

- Check that young people have sent off the completed questionnaires and that administration is running smoothly
- If there are any problems suggest to young person to contact WMTD
- Offer a debrief to young people after their interview in case difficult issues were raised – while maintaining confidentiality of interviewees.

Later involvement

1. Debriefing sessions

As you are doing these interviews different issues may come up. It is quite likely that many of the same things will come up for different people. It would also be interesting for WMTD to hear how it went for you and how you found the process of doing these interviews.

Your PA will be the main source of support for you as they are close by. So if any difficulties or issues have arisen from an interview please discuss these with your PA as soon as possible. Having someone you can talk to is very important as interviewing can be tiring and sometimes upsetting.

You will also have a link person from WMTD to see how you are getting on and what issues have come up for you. The WMTD link people are Sharn, Modi, Ernestina or Chantelle – the phone numbers are above.

We also hope to organise another session where all the interviewers can get back together to discuss relevant issues. This might also help us and others design a similar type of exercise in the future and learn how best to do this.

We will let you know the time and place for this in due course if and when this is happening. But in the meantime let us know if your address or phone number changes so we can contact you.

2. Involvement in further analysis of what was said by interviewees

All these interviews will generate a lot of answers and data. It is our job to make sense of this in the first instance and analyse what people have told us.

However we would also like to get your input into this. So we hope to arrange another meeting with all of you, especially to see our findings tally with the impressions you got during the interviews, pick out some of the key messages and gather your views and ideas about the issues raised.

Any meeting of that sort will be held after November 2006 when all the interviews are completed and questionnaires returned and initially analysed.