

CASE STORY

Robert's experience of being involved in the CommonHealth Assets Lived Experience Panel

Robert, 42, is based in London and a member of the Lived Experience Panel (LEP). After a difficult patch and a move to a new area, he wanted to make improvements to his life but found it hard to meet new people and to find out what support was available.*

Community involvement before the LEP



As I got older and started to focus on myself more, I didn't know where to get services or what was there. I tried to go to the doctor for support but they didn't really help, that put me down. They didn't signpost me anywhere."

Things started to change for him when he became involved in a local community centre and received support from the manager Jane*, who helped him to identify his skills and interests.



Before COVID I was involved in a few different things. It kept me busy but didn't help with my mental health issues overall, I was trying to meet someone who could support me. I started at [name of community centre]... The manager was really supportive there, she found out what my interests and skills were... We built a good connection and she helped to link me into therapy too."

This is where Robert discovered the LEP, through the encouragement of Jane, who recognized the potential benefit for him. Despite his initial nervousness, Robert decided to give it a try.



When I first started I wasn't sure, it takes me time to understand things. Jane, told me it would be a good opportunity so I thought I should try it."

Joining the LEP



...the first meeting on Zoom I remember I was nervous, I was just sitting listening. I was happy that [Mohasin] didn't push anyone to answer, [she] let people talk about their experiences at their own pace."



I was really on edge thinking I would be asked questions but my heart was telling me to stay as something good might come out of it. I'm glad that I stuck to it."

* Name changed.

Building connections

Over time once he became more comfortable, Robert spoke about how being involved in the CommonHealth Assets (CHA) project helped him to develop meaningful connections with fellow participants and in his local community. He feels these relationships have helped him to change his mindset for the better, and understand that he wasn't alone in his struggles.



Talking to others who have experienced similar things made me feel like I could overcome the issues I had. It made me realise that everyone goes through things.”



The Panel has helped me to come out of myself, it has helped me to control my nerves and to grow as a person. Having the support and new connections, I feel like I don't need to be this shy little boy that has to take a back seat.”



I started dealing with my health issues much better, my mental health and set-backs in life. Through speaking to others, I've realised how important it is to build a supportive network.”

Peer encouragement



Inspired by another LEP member's story, Robert has started a men's support group at the community centre he got involved in through the CHA project. This has allowed him to connect with others who have gone through similar challenges and to find ways to support one another.



I have started a men's group at [community centre]. I created this because I was at home feeling bad about myself and I wanted to go out and connect with other people, and bring people feeling the same together... Being able to do this was because of hearing how [another Panel member] did it and being gently pushed by [the project researcher]. Being connected to [the community organisation] through the Panel supported me to do this as well.”



It gives you a sense of importance that I can support other people as well as myself.”

The men's group has been running since June 2023 and now has 25+ members! Robert has plans to start a wellbeing group for all genders in the future, and to take part in a group facilitation course.

Overall impact of the LEP on Robert

Robert feels that things in his life have improved as a result of his engagement in the LEP, and CHA project, which has helped him to meet more people and find more support in his local area. He now has a stronger support network and feels empowered to contribute positively to his community. His initial struggles with identity, anxiety, and self-worth have improved and he now feels a sense of purpose and self-assurance.



I have a good support network now, I have people who can help me when issues come up. For example, I had an issue with my electricity at home and someone at [the community centre] helped me with this.”

In summary, Robert’s journey within the LEP showcases the benefit that taking part has had on his mental health, confidence and feelings of connectedness. His journey to now facilitating his own men’s group highlights the potential of mutually beneficial community-engagement activities in fostering positive change not only within research but for individuals taking part.



A few years ago I was bedbound, I didn’t have the mental capacity to see there was a light at the end of the tunnel. I feel a sense of belonging now, and I feel like I am good enough to do things now. I couldn’t see beyond session-by-session but now I see the outcome from the process.”

