

Case Study: Warwick Young Student Researchers Programme and the LYNCS Project

On: Engaging Young People in Developing Academic Research

Purpose: To show how rigorous medical research can include direct research by school-age children effectively.

Funding: National Institute for Health Research

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Date: April 2012.

Trevor Robinson (Research Development & Client Manager in the Institute of Education) leads the Warwick Young Student Researchers' Programme (WYSR) facilitating research projects that require input from young people: providing the key role of managing the expectations of both academics and schools.

WYSR designs and delivers only research-based learning, seeking to engage cohorts of young students with high level learning potential in a Warwick/collaborative research focused learning experience: an important consideration for a research intensive university. 'Students with Potential' may have the intellectual skills but WYSR aims to help raise their level of expectation and achievement by designing research opportunities which are highly motivational and supported by academic expertise. The LYNCS project is an excellent example of how significant academic research can be advanced alongside developing this 'potential' in young people, having a positive impact on all involved.

Long term illness, Young people and Networked CommunicationS (LYNCS) is a multidisciplinary research project led by Professor John Powell of the Medical School at Warwick. The aim is to explore the potential ways that networked communications, including Facebook and instant messaging, can be used to help the thousands of young people living with long term illnesses in the UK. The project invited Trevor's involvement to liaise with schools to support young people directly in the research. In the process of interviewing and setting up a network of experts to develop ideas LYNCS wanted to involve young researchers in providing feedback on whether the right questions were being asked, if they were looking in the wrong place for answers and guiding the team on which types of

technology are most popular and potentially most useful for supporting young people with long term illnesses: basically get a child's perspective on what children want and do.

Trevor's role through WYSR is essentially that of project manager/consultant to both school and department to drive the project forward and meet the objectives of BOTH parties – taking away the majority of the organisational burden, which can be a barrier to undertaking such collaborative research. As such he approached five diverse schools he had worked with before to build a team of 20 young researchers: all schools wanted to be involved again because of their previous positive experience with WYSR. The focus of the research involved a Campus Day, which Trevor has previously found crucial in engaging young people with their future potential and appreciating research focused learning. With access to academics and provided with WYSR research packs, the young people are effectively research students for the day, an experience that Trevor feels cannot be underestimated. With further opportunity to present their research findings, all participants are presented with WYSR certificates, invaluable for including in university applications.

In summary, Dr Jackie Sturt (LYNCS co-investigator) had this to say about the successful involvement of WYSR from the point of view of the Medical School.

The Young Researcher project has provided the Medical School with a strong and sustainable way of engaging with young people in relation to health issues of concern and relevance to them. In NHS speak we call this PPI, Patient Public Involvement. The Young Researcher project enabled us to undertake robust PPI work to explore the views of young people in relation to their use of social media and text messaging as a way of consulting and communicating with their health care professionals. For PPI to be really effective, the public need a degree of research knowledge as well as topic knowledge, which the Young Researcher project gave them. With the help of the Young Researcher project we were able to complete an important NHS R&D funded study and submit a substantial research grant application to the National Institute for Health Research worth £1.4 million to continue working on this important theme for the NHS. The Young Researcher Project will continue to be integral to the large proposed programme.

If the funding application is successful there will be a Young Researchers project every year for the next five years, advancing different aspects of the research. This could lead to the schools involved developing a distinct research centre focus and individual pupils having the opportunity to develop research skills and links with the university right from year 7.

For further details about LYNCS visit:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/hscience/sssh/research/netcomm/>