

## NIHR Three Research Schools - Seminar Series

### **Supported Volunteering at Ripon Museums: 'De-researchifying' research processes and methods in a sensitive way**

27 March 2023

**Speakers:** Martin Webber, Beth Casey & Helen Thornton

#### **Summary**

Supported volunteering provides a way for people who require additional support to access volunteering opportunities. However, limited research has been conducted on supported volunteering so we do not know enough about how, and if, it might help people. This presentation reports on the qualitative methods used for an evaluation of supported volunteering at Ripon museums, a collaboration between the International Centre for Mental Health Social Research (ICMHSR) at the University of York and the Ripon Museum Trust (RMT). A range of methods have been utilised in order to provide a choice for participants and to facilitate participation. This included having conversations with volunteers about their experience of support (rather than more formal interviews); observing support provided; and giving volunteers the opportunity to complete an audio or written diary about their experiences. The presentation will reflect on the 'sensitive' research approach taken; uptake and experience of participating in different methods and comparisons between the data produced. The presentation will conclude with practical considerations and researcher reflections on the methods used.

#### **Speaker biographies**

Martin Webber and Beth Casey

[Martin Webber](#) is Professor of Social Work at the University of York and Senior Fellow of the [NIHR School for Social Care Research](#). He writes a blog - [Musings of a social work academic](#) – and produces the [Social Work Research Podcast](#).

[Beth Casey](#) is Research Associate at the University of York.

#### **Seminar series editor commentary and highlights**

This innovative project evaluates a supported volunteering scheme for people with mental health problems. The presentation brings to light the process of translation that is often required when undertaking research in new settings and with people who may not be familiar with research terminology. Beth and Martin describe this as 'de-researchifying'. Beth and Martin highlight, however, that 'de-researchifying' is not just a matter of making research procedures understandable, but also one of reducing threat and anxiety. Such procedures might raise questions about how research is represented to participants and whether this is ethical or not. There seems to be a balance between ensuring that the most underserved groups are represented in research and making such research accessible and non-threatening whilst maintaining transparency about the implications of their involvement. As Beth and Martin point out, however, in the field of social there is perhaps more flexibility around such apparent conflicting principles. Moreover, the approaches they adopted prioritised choice.

Assisting with this process was the Advisory Group for the project, comprising a range of stakeholders including volunteers, practitioners from the heritage sector, and representatives from the National Academy for Social Prescribing, performing the role of critical friend at every stage of the process.

### **References and resources**

<https://riponmuseums.co.uk/>

### **Links:**

- [Link to YouTube Recording](#)