

Disabled Young People's Hopes and Dreams in a Rapidly Changing Society: Co-Production Peer Research

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Abstract : This co-production project aimed for an expansive exploration of disabled young people's hopes and dreams in the context of unprecedented societal changes. The research questions developed with disabled young people acting as peer researchers, ask 'what does a good life look like now, and, what are your hopes and dreams for the future?' Disabled children's childhood studies and an asset-based approach placed the voice of disabled young people at the centre of the research process and inviting participants to 'think big'! Over 18 months, academics, members of a Centre for Independent Living and peer researchers, came together to facilitate knowledge cafes with fifty disabled young people aged between 14 and 25 in a college and youth club setting. Methods used included trigger questions, photos voice, video, and cartooning. The peer researchers also investigated how house robots and connected autonomous vehicles might support their future aspirations and sense of freedom in this new era with a trip to the university robotic laboratory. Key themes arising from participants' hopes and dream were about 'being responsible', 'loving', 'freedom and happiness' and a 'strong sense of self and togetherness' and suggest alternative narratives and rich visions of the future possibilities for disabled young people. The five key messages peer researchers produced for the report emphasised freedom to define their futures, desires to make the world a better place, to belong and have the chance of their own family life. Thematic analysis, production of the report and impact activities were all co-produced and as the project progressed peer researchers increasingly demonstrated a role as 'change makers' and have formed a young people's co-production group going on into the future. Discussion of the project highlights the factors that made these processes successful and the ethical dilemmas encountered in the context of normalcy. Finally, we consider the implications for all involved as we rethink 'the future', not in terms of normative ideals or trajectories, or seeing service 'transition' as an end, but in terms of disabled young people's contribution, participation, freedoms, and possibilities.

Keywords : co-production, disability, robotic, youth

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