Public Involvement Enhancing Research (PIER) Member Biographies

Laura Collins

Professional Background:

Nursing background, management graduate, university disability mentor.

Expert-by-Experience:

"*24/7 unpaid Family Carer for past 42 years. Currently supporting two adult children. Decades of voluntary advocacy work and activism in support of family carers and those with disabilities - of which 30 years formally representing family carers at local, regional and national levels*"

Recent involvement experience

- Member of a number of carer, disability voluntary groups, APGs
- Independent Expert Carers Panel Chair- reform of adult social care and support
- HSCQI Leadership Alliance - Expert-by-experience Representative
- Adult Safeguarding- member of PCC Engagement Platform(with DH)
- Regional PPI - Involvement Monitoring and Verification Groups
- Inquiry into Hyponatraemia Related Deaths (IHRD) - Involvement Group
- Advance Care Planning- lived experience member of Regional Steering Group
- Integrated Care System - Involvement Workstream – deputy co-chair
- IMPACT (IMProving Adult Care Together) UK – Assembly member NI
- Research in Practice (England) - PPI group on ASC

Research Interests

- Commissioning for integrated health
- Older People and healthier ageing
- Family Carer pathway development
- Reducing socio-economic health inequalities
- Prudent Healthcare

Alan Drennan

"I live in Belfast, am a Business Studies graduate and an associate member of CIPD. Previously I was a Director in an HSS Trust and have also served as a School Governor in an integrated primary school in Belfast".

Current PPI involvement

- Member of a study examining Telemonitoring in health care
- Member of the steering group which is responsible for the Nicola project (a longitudinal study of ageing)
- Member of Panel appraising Enabling Research Awards
- Member of a panel appraising Knowledge Transfer Requests
- A user representative on the panel for Doctorate of Clinical Psychology applicants, QUB

Research interests

- Use of technology in the delivery of health and social care
- Healthy living issues including the benefits of exercise and issues around obesity
- Conditions concerned with ageing
- Mental health issues including psychology research and the use of different therapies
- Issues around emergency services in health care

Jackie Granleese

"Before I retired in 2015, I worked in academia most recently for 18 years in Norwich Business School at the University of East Anglia as a Senior Lecturer holding administrative positions such as MBA Course Director and Senior Advisor for the School. I have also lectured and researched at Ulster University, Queen's University Belfast, and Sunderland University. I have published over 30 academic papers in peer reviewed journals, given papers at academic conferences, and supervised hundreds of BSc, MSc and MBA dissertations as well as successfully supervising doctoral students. My qualifications (BSc Hons; DPhil) are in Applied Psychology, Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE with commendation), and Professional Development (MEd with distinction).

I have taught various subjects in my academic life most recently Leadership and Organisational Change, Management Consulting and Development, Research Methods and Human Resource Management. I was a Chartered Health Psychologist, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and a member of the British Academy of Management. I have loved my career in academia, especially being given the opportunity to make a positive difference in students' lives.

Throughout I have taken a great interest in women's issues and have published on girls' perceived competence, menorrhagia, HRT, women in management, lookism, and gender issues in advertising. My particular areas of expertise are in research design, both quantitative and qualitative research methods and psychometrics. I hope to bring the love I have for research and the passion I have for teaching, and supporting and nurturing individuals' development to PIER.

Previously I have sat on a Steering Committee of the Patient and Client Council as a patient representative advising apposite content and on questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule design and analyses. Currently I sit also on the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Research Public Involvement Committee (NIAS RPIC). I enjoy gardening, pub quizzes, crosswords, jigsaw puzzles and my 8 grandchildren".

Margaret Grayson

"My professional life was spent in the NHS, 40 years in the Cancer Centre as a Therapeutic Radiograher, with a specific interest in psycho- oncology (I have an MSc in Counselling and a Post-Grad in Psychotherapeutic Studies)

I had my first breast cancer diagnosis in 2004 and my second in 2021. While I was having my treatment in 2004 I realised every treatment decision was based on research. I was invited to join Pier and the NICRCF in 2010. This ignited my passion for cancer research and the importance of the patient voice embedded in it. I am involved in partnering with researchers as my way of giving back for my treatment and care, helping to improve things for other patients".

These are some areas of my current involvement:

- NI Cancer Research Consumer Forum (NICRCF) – member (Chair, 2011-2021)
- PHA R&D Pier (Public Involvement Enhancing Research)
- R&D Doctoral Fellowship Panel – member
- Facilitator – R&D Building Research Partnerships
- Chair, NCI/CRUK Cancer Grand Challenges Advocacy Panel
- useMydata – member
- EORTC (European Organisation of Research and Treatment of Cancer) Patient Panel
- HRA/NIHR Shared Commitment – Public Contributor, HSCNI
- ICPV (Trustee)
- NI RRG Oversight Group – PIER representative
- Member of several study steering groups

"In April 2018 I was awarded the Iris Colvin Lifetime Achievement Award for Health and in June 2018 was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Honours list for services to cancer research".

Ray Hamilton

"I am Ray Hamilton, I have cerebral palsy and despite being non-verbal I have a lot to say. I communicate with my eye, bliss board and always have a PA, who I employ through SDS payments, who verbally communicates for me. I have a degree in Health and Social care.

Expert by knowledge Experience

I have been a member of the SHSCT PPI panel from 2010 and through it have become involved in many areas within the Trust. I am a member of the Patient Client Experience Committee and Steering Group (Now referred to as the Working Together Steering Committee). The newly functioning Care Experience Hubs, which have been co-developed as part of the Working Together Strategy, has become a new area of involvement for me as a User Involvement Ambassador. I co-chair the Southern Trust LEP (Local Engagement Partnership) and attend the regional meetings with the DoH. This came from my original work with the Social Work Strategy which I started with back in 2012.

Other areas of involvement include.

- Physical Disability Forum Southern Trust
- Regional HSC PPI Forum
- Regional Service User/Carer Reference Group PHA
- Encompass Development Committee
- Patient Client Experience

Research Involvement

In the past I sat on the Research Advisory Group for the PHA's PPI and It's Impact Research which was being Led by Professor Joe Duffy. I sit on the Management Board committee for the Social Work Community Development Course, part of my role at the minute is helping complete forms for UKRI Trial accelerator bid for a research project. I Sit on the SHSCT Research Governance Committee as a service user rep. This has been a highlight for me as I see all the different areas of research that are being approved".

May McCann

Professional Background

- Volunteer Women's Sector NI - Women into Politics Project'.
- Involvement in international women's peace building initiatives in NI Equality Coalition.
- Trainer in Diversity and Anti-discrimination measures in Public bodies.
- Lecturer in Social Anthropology QUB (1972-1997).
- Research: Politics of Culture, Equality and Diversity.
- Chair: Women's Support Network, Bamford Monitoring Group, CAUSE (regional charity providing peer support and advocacy to mental health carers).
- Non-executive board Member Patient and Client Council (2009-2018).

Expert by Experience role

Involvement in co-production as mental health carer includes working with voluntary, statutory, professional and academic sectors, including:

- Bamford Review, Carers Forum and Expert Committee on Human Rights
- NI Mental Capacity legislation
- Mental Health 10 Year Strategy development
- Mental Health and Learning Disability Service Team (HSC Board)
- Restraint and Seclusion Project Board (DH)
- Adult Mental Health Care Pathway
- Recovery College (BHSCT)
- RCPsychiatrists - Curriculum Committee, Revalidation Committee.
- Appointed to RCPscyh Special Committee on Human Rights
- Input to Trainee teaching, MH Nursing, Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, Psychiatry

Recent Involvement Experience

- CAUSE advisory role on Board
- PIER (Public Involvement Enhancing Research) RD, Public Health Agency
- Doctorate in Clinical Psychology QUB - Selection Committee, Research Committee
- Research: Interdisciplinary Professional Training in the Mental Health Detention Process
- Regional Learning Together Working Together Forum (DH)
- SQW evaluation of IMPACT (IMProving Adult Care Together) UK

Sonia Patton

"I have experienced cancer as a patient and other long-term health issues. I am a passionate advocate for the patient and public voice and that opportunities are created to ensure their parity of participation in research decisions that impact their treatment and care.

I am particularly keen to promote involvement in quality of life studies that are inclusive of the patient journey and daily struggles when living with long-term conditions. This extends to raising the profile in cancers of unmet need in particular oesophageal and pancreatic cancers, having experienced loss of close friends and family to these cancers.

I have worked in the private sector in procurement and manufacturing roles, in the voluntary mental health sector in project management. I have a Master's degree from Ulster University in the Development and Co-production of Social Care Research and sit on core health and social care research groups in Northern Ireland as a service user partner. I currently work in partnership with the Health and Social Care Research lead, Queens University and Ulster University along with community and voluntary sector partners; in co-producing and cottoning research courses for service user and carers.

I currently work in an advisory capacity with many organisations who rely on health data and recognise its significance in research to improve outcomes for all patients. This includes lay representation on Clinical Practice Research Datalink, Can Gene Can Var patient reference panel, the Clinical Research Committee at Cancer Research UK, National Cancer Research Institute's Consumer Forum.

Living in Strabane a rural town in N. Ireland, I am also a member of Northern Ireland Cancer Research Consumer Forum, Public Involvement Enhancing Research and work closely with local researchers on clinical studies at national level. These experiences have helped me understand the very diverse UK research landscape and I enjoy learning from and working with all contributors".

Francesco Santino Palma

“I am from Bath, England & first got involved in voluntary work (advocacy work in mental health forensic medium secure hospital) while recovering from heart surgery after my third heart attack.

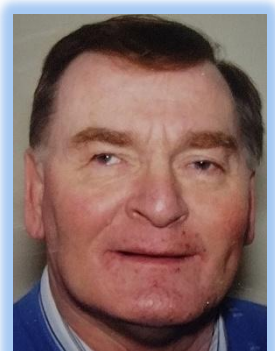
My interest in research stems from being appointed as a lay board member on the NIHR NETSCC SDO funding committee for three years as it was up until 2012 today it is renamed as Health & Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR). Other involvement opportunities included NIHR South East & South West Research Design Service (RDS) on the Project Management Committee reviewing research applications prior to submission for peer review.

I have been involved in different research studies that covered area of personal interest to include Mental Health, NHS management & Leadership, Treatment Resistance Depression and Cardiovascular disease research studies which support my personal journey from surviving an Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest in 2019 & being discharged six weeks later with both an ICD and diagnosis of severe heart failure, using online peer support both here & America has been of great benefits to self-managing my symptoms, also being involved with James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership for Heart Surgery, Advanced Heart Failure & Community Nursing has aided my knowledge to better support & managed my conditions & would recommend Patients, service users, Public & Carers to get involved.

Presently I am a Co-applicant PPI Lead for 5 year funded research study(NIHR CCF PGfAR) which started in June 2021 looking into three long term conditions while involved with Co-Production, Personal/Patient & Public Involvement & Engagement groups that cover Mental Health, Cardiovascular, Clinical Psychology (DClinPsych) & Neurodevelopmental Disorders & Patient Panel member with #CVDPREVENT https://www.nhsbenchmarking.nhs.uk/cvdpreventlanding

I have experienced being involved as a participant in research studies & undertaken training to become a HRA Research Ethics Committee (REC) lay member to understanding their role in approving research application. My learning is still ongoing & look forward to my membership of PIER NI”.

Ian Stafford



"I live in Dungannon and am physically inhibited because of life-long cerebral palsy; I have also been a type 1 diabetic since 1980. Since a tender age I have been the grateful recipient of a substantial number of the increasing collection of health and social services provided in Northern Ireland".

Academic Qualifications:

- BA degree in Business Studies
- Diploma in Training Management

Professional Development

During my working career I have been employed in administrative and accounting positions in the public and private sectors. My final 14 years of employment was in Armagh College of Further Education as a part-time lecturer teaching business, marketing and accounting subjects at level 5. I also delivered for a 2-year period at level 6 and on a part-time basis management and financial accounting for Queens University students studying at their Armagh campus.

Current PPI Involvement:

I have been a member of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's PPI panel since 2016 which has given me a substantial insight into both the structure and operational aspects of the Trust. Such insight was greatly enhanced when my PPI membership afforded me the opportunity to participate, alongside full-time staff and Non-Executive Directors of the Trust, in assessing and adjudicating on staff from a wide range of departments who had been nominated by their colleagues for the various annual awards.

Current PPI membership also provides me with information relating to impending opportunities to become involved in the work of the Patient and Client Council. Such discussions provide opportunities to become involved in the relaying of service users, carers and the public's opinions on an extensive range of health and social care issues which in turn are conveyed to key decision makers e.g. in 2021 I attended and actively participated in several workshops relating to the issue of Participating in Undergraduate Medical education as a Patient.

Research Interests

Since having to take early retirement due to decreasing mobility I was and remain passionate about devoting a substantial proportion of my time, experiences and skills attained to be a constructive contributor to the wellbeing of the local health and social care services.

My entire career has involved undertaking methodical research. In my teaching capacities where I was imparting knowledge to mature students, the vast majority of whom occupied managerial positions within the public and private sectors. With reference to both my PPI panel membership and participation in the Patient and Client Council deliberations it has always been my practice to undertake structured and comprehensive research on all topics before deliberating in either body. The window of opportunity to meaningfully deliberate is often small therefore I have always been of the opinion that I must be brief and decisive in expressing my views".

Noel Wilson

"I worked in the University of Ulster for almost 40 years, where I was an Assistant Director and Head of ICT Customer Services, with responsibilities for teaching, learning, and research support. I was awarded a Distinguished Learning and Teaching Support Fellowship for my role in enhancing the student experience.

I hold a post graduate diploma and a master's degree in Mathematical Studies and Fellowships of "The British Computer Society" and "The Institute of Mathematics and its Applications". I am a Chartered IT Professional and a retired Member of the Federation of Holistic Therapies.

My Six Sigma "Green Belt" qualification and my Registered Practitioner status in Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®), Management of Risk (MoR®) and PRINCE2® (Project Management) have applicability beyond the realms of IT.

Since joining PIER, I've participated in Doctoral Fellowship Panel shortlisting and interview activities, as well as engaging in a number of dental-related research projects as a PPI (personal and public involvement} voice. I am interested in persons' experiences when confronting clinical procedures (the 'client-professional' relationship), especially those 'softer' interpersonal relationships.

Leisure interests include complementary therapies, DIY, travel and undertaking courses. Presently, I am undertaking a master's degree in Development and Co-Production of Social Care Research.

I'm an avid lover of animals, especially cats and small dogs".

Bekki Reid-Millar

Having trained as an adult nurse I was always aware that any treatment went through extensive research and testing before it was approved for use. When the opportunity arose almost a decade ago to join Diabetes UK London in research, I jumped at the chance and became the only person from Northern Ireland at inception to join this brand new venture of clinical studies research groups which are made up of lay members, HCP's, and researchers. I remain active with them today and the opportunities since have continued to present themselves.

I am a massive advocate for advances in technology to help people in their daily life to manage their health and also research into creating a world where diabetes can do no harm. I am also a massive advocate for research across the board to support all people living with a health condition or who need treatment of any kind. As previously mentioned, I volunteer for Diabetes UK London and have done since 2017. I became a member of the Diabetes Research Steering Group for Type 1: Targets, Preventions, and Therapies. The aim of this group is to help improve the lives of people with or at risk of diabetes through research. The groups bring together researchers, healthcare professionals, and people living with or associated with diabetes to pinpoint where exactly research needs to happen to have the greatest possible impact on individuals lives. I have worn both a lay PPI hat and currently an HCP hat within this role. This group is one of 7 that, alongside DUK, are leading the fight against the UK's biggest growing health crisis and silent killer. From this group, I became involved in the DUK mental health panel, ADDRESS-2 through Imperial College London, and I am on the database of NIHR as a lay reviewer of research proposals. I have co-authored 2 research papers both of which are published in Diabetic Medicine: one is entitled "Transforming mental well-being for people with diabetes: research recommendations from Diabetes UK's 2019 Diabetes and Mental Well-Being Workshop" and the other "Impact of glycaemic technologies on quality of life and related outcomes in adults with type 1 diabetes: A narrative review" I undertook the DUK Discovering Leadership course which was an amazing course for giving me tools for developing and leading change within both my professional world and my personal with the aim of sparking changes that will benefit everyone living with any form of diabetes and I will be undertaking the UK's first CBT and Diabetes Course starting January 2026 at Kings College London.

I also volunteer for Kings College London on a brand new project that is the first of its kind in the UK and I am, again, the only person from NI involved. This project is designing the first ever Diabetes Distress tool to be implemented into clinical practice along with a mandatory CPD training course for all healthcare professionals working with any type of diabetes. I believe the work that the work I do with multiple places in the field of Diabetes is my working indirectly for patients to advocate, strive for change for the better, and increase the awareness of Diabetes expelling myths and historical inaccuracies associated with living with diabetes to push for a world free from judgement or discrimination within this area. I am in the process of starting a consultancy business for people living with diabetes along with their carers, friends, and family with the aim of providing solid expertise advice based on my own knowledge and training and also peer support groups which are vital. Diabetes is my passion and my lifelong dream is to specialise and progress to a research doctorate however I have a desire to see research influence significant and long-lasting positive changes within the NHS to improve care and access to it for everyone.

Donna Maguire

I am a working professional and mother of one gorgeous daughter. My current role is in Vehicle Operations within the Private Sector.

My interests lie in health and wellbeing; with a particular interest in children's health. Because of this area of interest, I attend summits and seminars, get involved in community events and volunteer in research to improve health & wellbeing and overall public health.

I joined PIER in 2024 and through this community I have completed some fantastic training, got to meet some inspirational people and use my voice to help improve research. I am very positive of a bright future ahead for PPI.

Current PPI:

Exploring the Factors Influencing Excess Weight in Children 0 – 5 years.

Enabling Research Awards 2024 – Panel PPI Reviewer

Enabling Research Awards 2025 – Panel PPI Reviewer

Enabling Research Awards 2026– Panel PPI Reviewer

MABEL (Maternal, Behaviours, Evidence & Linkage) – PPI Advisory Group

First-trimester Screening in Northern Ireland Research - PPI Advisory Role

Claire Beers

"I have been working in Engineering Project Management Consultancy as an Administration Manager for the past 25 years. The company specializes in delivering projects across the public and private sectors with a particular focus on renewable energy. Prior to this I worked in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry working in the UK and Ireland in a variety of managerial roles.

I became involved in PPIE research over 6 years ago. In the past 15 years I have been part of our family group who care for adult relatives with dementia and other long-term health issues. In my many interactions with Health Care Professionals I became increasingly aware of the vast range of needs that need to be met by the health care system. As a result of this I decided that I would like to become involved in research projects where my lived experience could help contribute to research.

I am particularly interested in the areas of health data research and the application to improving patient care. Alongside my ongoing carer role, I feel it is vital that we use our voice to help shape research for those who need increasingly complex care as they age".

PPI Experience

"I have been involved as a PPI member on several projects with University of Dundee these were, GrAImatter, Emapping and Alleviate. The latter was a 2 year project which developed a data hub as part of a wider project to collect data dedicated to improving research into chronic pain".

Current Involvement

PIER NI member

TRExt PPI member - University of Swansea.