MY VOICE MATTERS IN RESEARCH

Every young person deserves the chance to have their voice heard in mental health research, but that opportunity isn't always easy to access. Some young people face barriers that make it harder to get involved or feel included in the process. This results in research that doesn't fully reflect the diversity of young people's lives & experiences.

'My Voice Matters In Research' aims to uncover and understand those barriers, then discuss and develop ways to break them down. Co-produced with young people, the insights and recommendations set out in this series of resources aim to make mental health research more inclusive, accessible, and relevant for young people from all backgrounds.

To gather these insights, arts non-profit organisation **Made By Mortals** worked with four diverse groups of young people through a series of creative workshops. We would like to thank the young people for their contributions, and everyone who helped make the workshops possible..

Using drama and music-based activities, we explored what helps - and what gets in the way of - young people taking part in mental health research.

Together, each group co-created a fictional character that represented the lived experiences of everyone in the group. We started with some 'knowns' about the character; they were a young person with experience of

mental health illness & services and they had been approached to take part in mental health research. From there, the young people built up a picture of the character using '**The Tree of Life**' to fully explore them, from their roots to the storms that trouble them - adding in details about the character's thoughts, feelings, hopes, and everyday life. This collaborative process brought each character to life, allowing everyone to see a bit of themselves in them. Using a character in this way then gave the young people space to share their experiences safely while providing the rich insights you'll hear, which explores the barriers and enablers that shape participation in mental health research.

Alongside this, the young people worked with a musician to bring their character to life through music, deepening their connection to them. The music you'll hear across the 'My Voice In Research Matters' multimedia blends the creative contributions from the sessions, reflecting the characters' personalities and experiences.

Now, through a series of short videos, we'll meet the characters each group created. Each character reflects the experiences of a particular group, but, just like real young people, their lives are shaped by multiple, overlapping experiences. Many of the challenges they face – such as identity, or economic status - intersect in different ways, showing how underrepresentation in research is rarely one-dimensional.

You will also have the opportunity to explore 'The Tree of Life' diagram for each character, where you'll see what the group contributed to shape each character's:

- 🍃 **Roots** – Background, cultural history and influences
- 🍃 **Trunk** – Skills, abilities and personal strengths
- 🍃 **Branches** – Future aspirations and hopes
- 🍃 **Leaves** – Important relationships and support networks
- 🍃 **Storms** – Challenges they've faced or anticipate

Meet Kaya
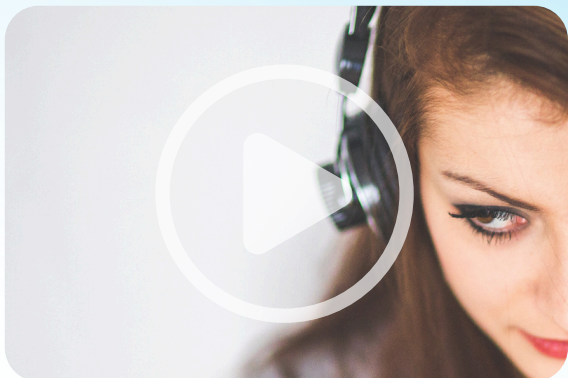
Click on the image to watch a one minute video introducing Kaya. Kaya is a character who was co-created by young people with experience in the justice system. Click **here** to see Kaya's 'Tree of Life'.

Meet Tara

Click on the image to watch a one minute video introducing Tara. Tara is a character who was co-created by young people from Global Majority communities. Click **here** to see Tara's 'Tree of Life'.

Meet Cat

Click on the image to watch a one minute video introducing Cat. Cat is a character who was co-created neurodiverse young people. Click **here** to see Cat's 'Tree of Life'.

Meet Harry
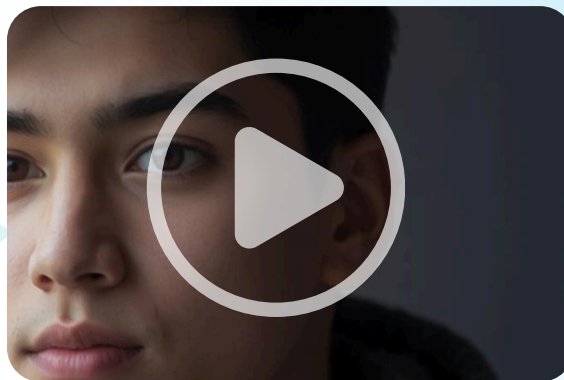
Click on the image to watch a one minute video introducing Harry. Harry is a character who was co-created by LGBTQIA+ young people. Click **here** to see Harry's 'Tree of Life'.

In the audio insights you'll hear in the next sections of this resource, the groups use the character they have created as a vehicle to explore the barriers, facilitators and innovations for better engagement.