



**Michaela Gwilliam**

Michaela is a 24-year-old student on the BSC critical approaches to counselling and psychotherapy programme. Having accessed the mental health services in the UK Michaela was inspired to study to become a therapist, however along the way she was inspired by community led organisations, working to improve the wellbeing of local communities. She plans to commence further study at master's level and to work in the Third sector.

## **Summer Research Internship with Dr Michael Richards at Edge Hill University.**

My name is Michaela, and I am a 24-year-old, and I am a student on BSc Critical Approaches to Counselling and Psychotherapy programme. I am about to start my third and final year on this course and will be hoping to complete a primary research dissertation this year.

In my first year, I had a module entitled 'Introduction to Research Methods'. At this point, my knowledge of what research means was limited to rigorous scientific or medical papers that I could hardly understand. They were full of jargon, and not only was the subject-specific language hard to understand, but when they started to mention P values, I had resigned myself to never fully understanding research. So, when Dr Michael Richards began teaching this module, I had a lot of preconceptions, most of which boiled down to my feelings of inadequacy/inability to conduct research. However, somewhere during this module, I found out that I enjoyed qualitative research. Suddenly this whole avenue of research was opened to me; where I had previously thought I would never be interested, let alone involved in, research, I had found a type of research that I felt comfortable and confident with.

In my second year, I had another research module where the basics I had learned the year before really came in handy, yet, this year, the learning was more in-depth, and I was learning about the procedural aspects of conducting research, in view of preparing for the third-year dissertation. Upon completion of this module, I was comfortable with qualitative research methods; however, when I saw that I had the opportunity to be a research intern within AHSC, I jumped at the chance, knowing that it would be an excellent learning experience and chance to utilise my knowledge in real world research.

I applied, was interviewed, and appointed a research intern with Dr Richards' research project. He was conducting a systematic review within the field of Community Psychology, which intrigued me. Whilst Community Psychology was not my area of study or particular interest, I was familiar with Dr Richard's work and felt that his area of expertise aligned with my interests. Subsequently, I was keen to learn more about research and Community Psychology values. I have always appreciated opportunities to apply my learning practically, and this research internship was precisely that. I was getting the chance to work alongside a staff member whose work I respected greatly and apply skills I had learned in lectures.

I was tasked with doing the scoping searches initially within the process of doing a systematic review, which helped me to understand what it was Dr Richards was working on. I spent quite a few hours reading papers relating to the studied topics and making notes of any references that I thought would be pertinent to the research project. Once I felt confident, I had completed the scoping searches, I then began the literature search. I will not pretend that it is the most exciting thing to do; spending hours trawling through academic databases. Nevertheless, I learned several things in this process. I realised just how useful it is to create an account with these databases, enabling you to save the articles you want into a handy folder. It also saves your searches so that when you need to evidence your search terms, it is ready to export. I became more familiar with how the databases worked and how to find the required results, which I feel all students should be familiar with. It is much more than simply typing in your research question; using appropriate Boolean operators, truncation, and phrases are vital in searching databases. My top tip for database searching is to make a note of your searches when you are doing the searches just in case you forget to log in or get distracted. Technology is a

wonderful thing when it works, but human error should still be accounted for, and it is better to have two copies of your searches than none.

Another thing that is important for other students to note is that although Google Scholar is an appealing tool when conducting your research, be it a primary piece or literature review, you are better served by using academic databases. You are more likely to get better, more accurate results, and they are specifically designed for you to be able to narrow down your search parameters to quite specific criteria. Learn to use them effectively, and they will become your best friend.

Most of my time on this internship was spent conducting the literature search; however, I managed to progress to screening and the beginnings of data extraction. Throughout the internship, I had many interesting conversations with Dr Richards and learned a lot about conducting a systematic review and even more comprehensive skills I can apply throughout my academic journey. This opportunity also helped me narrow down my dissertation topic as it gave me a reason to read through many interesting papers from a wide variety of perspectives. I feel like this opportunity prepared me even more for my dissertation. Even though I have chosen to conduct a different type of research than what I was working on with Dr Richards, I am much more confident going forwards. Research has been de-mystified and made more accessible to me, which is why I encourage students to use the opportunities afforded to them because you never know what you will learn that you can use later on.