Speaking of Research

South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership Podcast

Series 1 – Episode 1 – Sadie Rockliffe

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Sensory inequalities, blue spaces, Visual impairments, Lived experiences, Research methodology, Interdependence, Swim along interviews, Accessibility, Social prescribing, Open water safety, Sighted guide, Community engagement, Dissemination, PhD research.

SPEAKERS
Sadie Rockliffe, Catherine McDonald

Catherine McDonald 00:04
Hello and Welcome to Speaking of Research, a podcast from the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership. I'm Catherine McDonald, and in this first series of our podcast, we're talking about impact and how researchers can achieve it. We're recording at the amazing Cumberland Lodge, and we're speaking to doctoral researchers about their research, who might benefit from it, and how they hope it will make a difference. In this episode, I'm joined by Sadie Rockliffe from the University of Brighton, who's researching sensory inequalities and access to blue spaces. Sadie, that sounds great. Can you tell me a bit more about it?

Sadie Rockliffe 00:43
Hi, yeah. So I'm going to be exploring with people with visual impairments and how they access the water for their wellbeing. So by blue spaces, I mean natural environments that could be rivers, oceans, lakes and seas, and how they their lived experiences are when they get to those places to try and relax and be able to enjoy the day to day life.

Catherine McDonald 01:06
And can I ask what motivated you to look into this for a PhD?

Sadie Rockliffe 01:11
Okay, so my journey was based on answering a call initially, which you then adapt to make it more, so it suits you. I come from about a 20 year career in destination management. So I work with people in the past who are in marginalised organisations and different groups to be able to help amplify their voices, work out what their needs are, to be able to ensure that we have quite inclusive communities, personally as well, my late dad had a little fishing boat, so we always used to go out in the water, and we used to pop off on the side of the boat and swim with the porpoises around the South Coast, which was always lovely. So, I have quite an internal affiliation with nature as well. Yeah.

Catherine McDonald 01:51
So you know what it does for you. You want to share that. Tell me also about the methodology that you're using. I've heard you've got some quite interesting research methods at play.

Sadie Rockliffe 02:01
Yeah, definitely. Well, to be able to understand people's lived experiences who have vision impairment, we need to be able to understand the processes that go through. So, we want to be able to highlight what it means for them. We want to be able to voice those ideas, and we then want to look at the different barriers that are involved. But to do that is something that you need to do in a process where you're working with them. So, it's very important to build up some very good relationships. We will access these blue spaces together. They're chosen by them. We're going to get actually do some unfamiliar spaces as well, but we're going to choose some wonderful lakes and local rivers and seas, and we're going to go down to the water's edge, and then we're going to also get into the water together. So we're going to do some swim along interviews together. I say swimming, it may be bobbing, it may be spitting out water, if the tides and the waves are pretty intense, or they may want to go off and swim, and then we'll come back when they feel comfortable to do so and have a nice chat.

Catherine McDonald 02:56
And do you feel that you will get a different interview doing it that way, to one that you would get just sitting across a desk?

Sadie Rockliffe 03:02
Yeah, definitely. Now that's not to say that there isn't a place for sit down interviews. We will also be taking part in some walking interviews. They're very reflective spaces, but for me, actually getting into the water, getting in situ in these blue spaces that are very dynamic. Each one is very, very different. There's lots of things to think about. You're really getting that in the moment, concept and ideas about what they are going through and what we're going through together. One of the main areas of this research is to support the idea and the notion of interdependence. I think within our culture, independence is very much celebrated and promoted. But actually, in reality, that's not the case. Other cultures very much celebrate interdependence. We may even seem as independence, it's just we have the infrastructure to support that. So, for me, being able to get into the water together, be able to celebrate this interdependence, whether it be with a swim guide, with myself, it could be with floats or other ties, attachments or things that work for everyone individually. It's about being able to truly understand what it means to have that embodied, lived experience at the time.

Catherine McDonald 04:05
It sounds amazing. What new insights do you think your PhD is going to provide? And obviously, importantly, how do you hope those insights will go on to benefit people?

Sadie Rockliffe 04:16
Yeah well, that's a really good question. I think, firstly, these swim along interviews of people vision impairment hasn't been done before. So, it's going to be a really dynamic and new way of understanding people's lived experiences, or those particular people that I will be speaking to. So, it's going to be able to extend on knowledge. It's going to be able to provide new methodologies that we can then build and work on. It's also going to hopefully be able to have people take a step back and reassess when we have these social prescribing, which is very popular at the moment, to get into nature. They can be very ableist, they're very individualistic. So, it's about trying to reframe that, to be able to show, like I said before, this whole concept of interdependence and really working together. The end goal, obviously, is try to make blue spaces and nature environments more accessible for everybody, so everyone can have their version of their wellbeing when they're there in as safe a way as possible.

Catherine McDonald 05:13
And I understand you have a paper under review at the moment.

Sadie Rockliffe 05:16

Yes, yeah, keeping everything crossed at the moment, it's about the pre-field work stage. So, it's pre participation, and it's really sort of emphasising that importance about engaging and belonging with your participants. So, taking the case study of my particular project, prior to beginning the field work, I took a open water safety qualification to be able to support myself and others in the water as best I can. I also became a qualified sighted guide, and I also volunteer with various visual impairment charities on lots of really fun outdoor activities, including pub lunches, AX throwing, rambling, sailing, lots of different things. And the importance of that for me isn't to be able to better understand your participants, per se, because that's not what it's about. Everyone is diverse and different. For me, it's about being able to understand and get a sense of being with in different community groups. It's about being able to understand, as a researcher, that you should and you can be vulnerable and have that sense of risk, and actually, by opening yourselves up, it means that you're much more likely to be able to appreciate and understand how dynamic certain situations can be. So, like the academic Haraway said in the past, it's not about responsibility, it's about response-ability. So be able to change the different dynamics whilst you're doing the field work. And I think as well, I mean blue space obviously is a very dynamic environment, but you can definitely put that into a whole vast array of research areas.

Catherine McDonald 06:45
And how are you going to try and ensure that your research has the impact that it should have? What are you going to do to try and get it out there?

Sadie Rockliffe 06:53
Yeah, all dissemination is going to be co-produced. So I'm working with people constantly getting ideas out there, seeing what people are thinking, coming up with things together, it's going to be very creative. I'm presuming it's certainly not going to focus solely on an ocular centric perspective. So of course, academic papers are something I will do as a byproduct, but we'll also do films, more podcasts, lots of radio work, lots of textile, hands on for the experiences. I don't want to commit to anything at the moment, because actually, everything changes every time I volunteer, every time I'm helping or working alongside people with visual impairment we're coming up with new ideas. So we're just going to see how it works and go from there

Catherine McDonald 07:00
And that co-production element you talk about.

Sadie Rockliffe 07:02
Yeah, absolutely.

Catherine McDonald 07:07
Sadie, we wish you all the best for your PhD as you continue with it. Thank you for talking to us today, and thanks to you for listening to this episode of Speaking of Research from the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership. To find out more, please visit southcoastdtp.ac.uk, and don't forget to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to access earlier and forthcoming episodes. This was a Research Podcast production.