Handout 5: Participatory Research

Participatory research:
- challenges the belief that a researcher can separate themselves from the people who are being researched
- is people centered
- does not assume that the knowledge and perspective of the researcher is in any way “better” or more insightful or more truthful than the understanding and perspective of the people being researched
- considers the process of research to be interactive The acquisition of knowledge occurs through relationships, education, communication and action and reflection
- is linked to social change and working collectively on social problems.

The methods preferred by participatory researchers include:
- Talking with people, using two-way communication rather than the one way flow of information used traditionally in research. This dialogue helps the people being researched to understand what is happening in their lives. The researcher shares their perspective on what they have been told about the person’s life by asking questions that help the participant to critically reflect upon their experiences in the wider social context. This stands in contrast to traditional research methods which do not pass comments on the views of the research participant in order to avoid contaminating or biasing the information.
- Working in partnership with research participants in order to avoid the power imbalance that exists in a traditional research relationship. To do this the researcher has to abandon the idea that they are the “expert”. The researcher must also reflect upon their own professional practice by considering how their own class, culture, gender, beliefs and values can frame the research analysis and the research report.
- Any methods that can be used and understood by all stakeholders in the research. The range of methods which have been used include observation, archival and historical research, narrative, oral history, individual and groups interviews, surveys. If the methods are beyond the material or technological resources of the people involved in the research they can’t be used.