

Thesis title: Walking in a winter wonderland? The role of weather for older adults' winter walking practices in County Durham.

Supervisors: Prof. Cassandra Phoenix, Prof. Caroline Dodd-Reynolds

What is your current role, and what does your work involve?

My current role is Bid Writer and Project Manager at Ability Consultants, where I support predominantly charitable organisations to secure funding for projects and oversee their successful delivery from inception through to completion.

Over the past 12 months, I am proud to have helped secure more than £1.3 million in funding for charities across the UK, enabling them to expand services, improve facilities, and increase their impact within local communities. This has included a £3 million hospice expansion, a £6.5 million helicopter acquisition, and a £1 million refurbishment of a Grade II-listed art studio. These projects have required a combination of strategic bid writing, stakeholder engagement, project coordination, and funding management to ensure successful outcomes for the organisations involved.

How did your Masters by Research help prepare you for this role?

A key aspect of the Masters was working with multiple stakeholders, including academic supervisors, partner organisations, funders and external contributors, to achieve a shared objective. This helped me develop the collaboration and communication skills that I now use daily when working with charities, funders, and project partners.

Most importantly, I can honestly say that I would not be in my current role without my Masters by Research. The project was funded by a charity, which led directly to employment with that organisation upon completion of my degree. That experience provided the foundation, skills, and professional opportunities that ultimately enabled me to secure the role I hold today.

Beyond the career opportunities it created, the Masters remains one of my proudest achievements. It is something I look back on very fondly, and it's helped me feel more confident of throwing myself into more challenges at work.

What knowledge or skills from your Masters by Research do you use most in your work today?

Following the completion of my Masters by Research I worked for Rise North East; a health and wellbeing charity dedicated to increasing physical activity and improving health outcomes across the North East. These roles provided an early opportunity to apply knowledge about increasing physical activity I had developed during my research and laid the foundations for my current career as a Bid Writer and Project Manager.

The skills I use most frequently today are research, report writing, project management,

and stakeholder engagement. Throughout my Masters, I learned how to investigate complex topics, analyse large amounts of information, and present findings in a clear, evidence-based, and accessible way. These skills are now central to my work, particularly when developing funding applications, writing reports, and demonstrating the impact of projects to funders and stakeholders.

My research project also provided my first substantial experience of project management. Successfully completing a long-term research project required careful planning, organisation, time management, and the ability to balance multiple priorities while working towards a clear objective. These are all skills that I continue to rely on when managing funding programmes and supporting projects through to completion.

In addition, the Masters gave me valuable experience in producing public-facing documents and communicating complex information to a variety of audiences. Whether I am writing funding bids, project reports, or impact evaluations, the ability to translate technical information into clear and compelling narratives remains one of the most important skills I gained from my research degree.