

Meet Karen Connell

Published on LEARNZ (<http://www.learnz.org.nz>)

Job:

Senior Researcher.

Job description:

I am a Research Manager and am responsible for overseeing research projects from start to finish. I write proposals, attend brainstorming, briefings and other meetings, conduct fieldwork, analyse the findings, prepare and give presentations and write final reports.

Work background:

My first job was managing superannuation plans for an insurance company in Wellington. I then moved to England for my big overseas adventure. I first worked for a company which exported goods to Oman on behalf of the Oman Royal Family. It was at my third 'proper' job and this was where I discovered my true passion; qualitative research. I worked at a small, specialist qualitative agency before moving to a Full Service International Agency. There, my specialty was qualitative research, but I worked closely with research teams from other disciplines and also managed multi-country qualitative studies. At UMR I work on qualitative and quantitative projects, but my preference is qualitative research.

Favourite part of job:

I most enjoy driving around New Zealand conducting face to face in depth interviews. I have visited places I never knew existed and have met some truly inspirational people. Group discussions, while more challenging are a lot of fun.

Least favourite part of job:

I am not very good or patient when proof reading documents and must admit to using poor grammar and misspelling words when I try to rush. Giving clients 'bad news' is also difficult, especially if they are very excited and positive about an idea, but the general public does not share their view.

What I am working on now:

I am working on a variety of interesting projects at the moment, including overseeing online tracking research for the Smart Motorway project, a qualitative study among grape growers, monitoring satisfaction with ACC services among their clients, understanding how and why people are using electronic cigarettes, evaluating peoples' knowledge and awareness of the alcohol and licensing laws and understanding how and why people choose which charities to support.

A quick story about a job well done:

One of my most memorable projects was a multi-stage evaluation of a new service

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for ACC clients. We interviewed 35 people at least three times over the course of 6-8 months; face to face and by telephone. After each stage of interviewing, we presented our findings to ACC who were then able to make immediate changes to the service. UMR was then able to evaluate the impact of those changes during the next round of interviews. Result – A satisfied client, engaged and enthusiastic participants and researchers who were proud of the work we had done and the insight and value we had added.

A (humorous) story about a job that went badly and what you learned:

my worst experience was when I was asked to do some pet food research. I suggested we convene the dog owners in a focus group, give them dog food to take home and telephone them back or reconvene the group a week or so later to talk about their experiences. However, the client wanted to convene owners with their dogs and give the dogs the food at the group. Against my better judgment I agreed; well we had dogs fighting, a couple were terrified and cowered on their owners' knees, one dog bit me when I went to pat it, one dog threw up the new dog food, a couple wouldn't even taste it. Result: dissatisfied client, unhappy participants and a researcher left wondering where it all went wrong and how to pick up the pieces. What did I learn? I learned that if you have concerns about a project or a methodology you need to communicate these early on. You must explain your concerns clearly and provide evidence where possible. As researchers we are keen to give a good impression and to win new jobs and clients, but it is important to stand up for yourself and while this sometimes means walking away from a project this is better than risking yours and your company's professional reputation.

Qualifications:

I have a Post Graduate Diploma in Communications, Advertising and Marketing.

Interests outside work:

I am kept busy with three teenage children, but during my free time I like to keep fit by attending Boot Camp and walking. I love the beach and going out on our boat, travelling, reading and socialising with friends.

[Watch the video](#) [1] where Karen talks about herself and her work.

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[2]

Karen Connell is a Senior Research at UMO. Image: K Connell collection.

Source URL: <http://www.learnz.org.nz/smartmotorways161/meet-karen-connell>

Links

[1] <https://vimeo.com/157404077>

[2] <http://www.learnz.org.nz/sites/learnz.org.nz/files/b-sm161-karen-connell.jpg>