



# Community Matters evaluation report

An examination of University of Bath academic and community member experiences and understandings of a community-based participatory research initiative

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## Executive Summary

This report examines the Community Matters programme which was a partnership between the University of Bath's Public Engagement Unit and the South West Foundation, designed to pilot Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). As part of Community Matters, five community organisations in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) received small SEED funding to undertake a project of their choice, in partnership with university researchers. The five projects were additionally supported by the South West Foundation -- a charity that has trained community organisations in research skills since 2007.

As part of the project Dr Leda Blackwood (Department of Psychology) conducted research examining participants' expectations and experiences of the programme and Mr Ed Stevens (Public Engagement Unit) conducted research on participant's learnings as part of his PhD in Education. This report is informed by these pieces of research and is organised in two parts. Part 1 provides an overview of the Community Matters project: How was it conceived, who was involved, what was done, and what, at the time of writing, were some of the outcomes. Part 2 examines the experience of the programme from the perspectives of the academic and community researchers; here the focus is on what can be learned about the underlying assumptions of the programme and what happened in practice.

The programme ran from 2016 to late 2018; this was longer than anticipated but all five projects did complete their research and produced reports as well as other outputs designed to maximise impact. This success of Community Matters was in no small part due to the role played by the Public Engagement Unit and the South West Foundation in providing structure and support; and the willingness of academic and community researchers to commit more time and resources than originally envisaged.

As hoped for, at the end of Community Matters, community organisations reported greater confidence in directing and conducting their own research and some anticipated doing so in the future either alone or in collaboration with academic partners. For their part, academic researchers developed new knowledge and skills in CBPR, increased their networks in the community and the university, and relished the opportunity to conduct applied research with local impact. Finally, the University has showcased its ability and commitment to work collaboratively with community partners in addressing local concerns. This has led to further collaborations including one with the newly elected Joint Member for Transport Issues in B&NES. *Community Matters*

The purpose of this pilot, however, was not simply to test a model; the purpose was to learn. In this report we draw on ethnographic observation and interviews conducted alongside the Community Matters programme to provide insight into academic and community researcher expectations, experiences, and reflections from the start of their involvement in the programme to the very end. We found a shared sense of purpose in achieving social change and an enthusiasm for learning that united academic and community researchers. We also found very real challenges that need to be overcome in such collaborations. Some of these challenges included building trust where there were

perceived power differences and, in some cases, prior experiences of academic exploitation; negotiating new roles and learning how to recognise and respect different areas of expertise; and managing tensions between the demands of the project and other accountabilities (e.g., to one's organisation and clients).

Below we identify five lessons that can inform future initiatives.

*L1: Providing a structure for the development of long term community relationships (as opposed to short-term project-based collaboration), and working with community organisations that can provide a brokering / gatekeeper role, is vital to enhancing (or protecting) both the community and the university's reputations.*

*L2: If the university is committed to developing academic researchers' skills and networks for working within communities then (a) clearer communication about the importance of support and recognition at all levels (including from line managers) is needed; and (b) consideration needs to be given to what this means in a context where investment in CBPR may not meet short-term objectives (e.g., REF publications).*

*L3: The allocation of time for academic researchers to develop community partnership research and the funding of community researcher time would send a strong signal that the university recognises and values this work.*

*L4: Whatever approach the university takes in the local region, it must ensure that (a) the university's systems do not risk the viability of small community organisations; and (b) that the objective is long term partnership that can contribute to rather than undermine community-wide capacity building.*

*L5: A key insight from this evaluation (and one that many reports have identified previously) is the importance of not taking a one size fits all approach to community partnership research. In developing approaches at UoB it will be important to be informed by research on the specific community context and the needs of community organisations within our region as well as the context and needs of academic researchers at different stages of their careers.*

***The Community Matters Programme is a truly unique research collaboration for the University Bath. Through working with the South West Foundation, local organisations can not only tap into funding but receive community level research training and support whilst working with academics to shape their research projects. (Helen Featherstone, Head of Public Engagement).***

This report is written with a view to inform further development of community partnership research at the University of Bath.

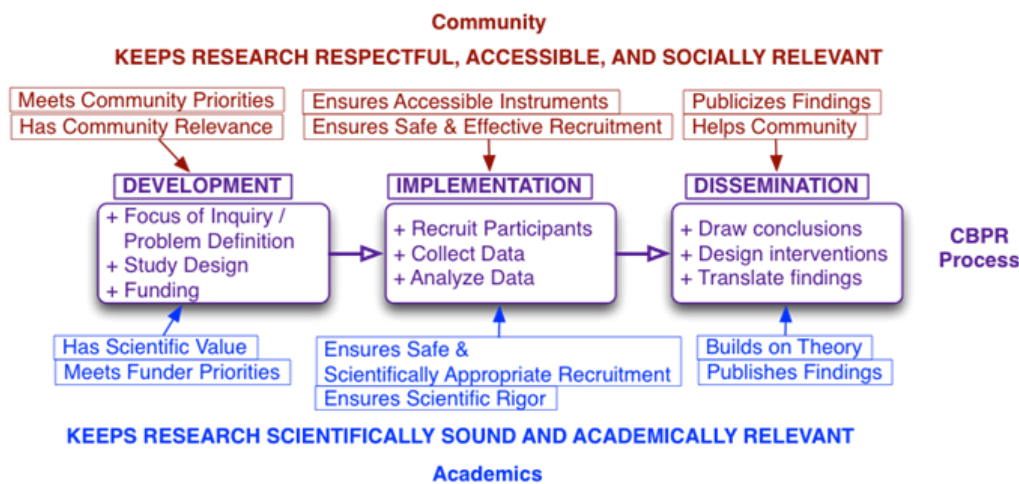
## Part 1 - *Community Matters* project overview

### Background and context

In 2016, the University of Bath's Public Engagement Unit partnered with the South West Foundation to conduct 'Community Matters', a pilot programme of community-based participatory research. The Community Matters pilot involved small SEED funding for five voluntary organisations in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) to undertake a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) project of their choice, in partnership with university researchers.

Many individual researchers at the University of Bath conduct research in and with local communities and have been doing so for some time. This is the first time, however, that the University of Bath, at an institutional level, has supported a research partnership with local community organisations. The impetus for this has come from several directions including the University's commitment to the NCCPE Manifesto regarding public engagement and the Public Engagement Unit's recognition that CBPR was missing from the portfolio of work supported since 2012; the University's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations which had a strong focus on engagement with communities in the BANES region; and the strategic benefits of placing the University at the forefront of developing responsible and engaged research practice in the United Kingdom.

The Community Matters project proposal explicitly describes the proposed research programme as Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). The CBPR approach sits alongside a number of longstanding traditions for conducting collaborative research in and /or with communities including responsible innovation and public engagement through to participatory action research (Facer & Enright, 2016). These traditions have distinct foundations. Some are concerned with improving the quality of research; within this frame communities are regarded as valuable resources for the production and validation of knowledge (Martin, 2010; Ostrom, 1996; Owen et al., 2013; Stephens, Ryan-Collins, & Boyle, 2008). Others are concerned with questions of equity and democracy and the right of communities to produce knowledge; here the emphasis is on partnership and empowerment (Benneworth, Charles, Conway, & Younger, 2009; Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Cook & Nation, 2016; Hart & Wolff, 2006; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The Community Matters conceptualisation of CBPR appears to straddle both. This rests on the assumption that collaboration (or partnership) between academics and non-academics fosters knowledge exchange and co-production to the benefit of all involved. Thus, the input of non-academics is regarded as valuable to keeping the research socially relevant and accessible, whilst the involvement of academics ensures that the research is scientifically sound and academically relevant.



Source: Academic Autistic Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education - <http://aaspire.org/?p=about&c=cbpr>

Advocates of this broad conceptualisation of CBPR and more general efforts to involve community in the co-production of knowledge, propose a few normative beliefs. These include (a) the research should not reproduce knowledge hierarchies of the expert versus the layperson; (b) the integrity of the research process should be protected; and (c) the research should be relevant and have useful outcomes (Durose, Beebejaun, Rees, Richardson, & Richardson, 2011; Martin, 2010). Thus, a central tenet of CBPR is the importance of co-creating a shared project based on the identification of shared values and goals, whilst recognizing and respecting the values and interests entailed in the distinct identities. The Community Matters Programme was carefully designed to facilitate these processes. Critical to this was partnering with the South West Foundation in the design and implementation of the programme.

### Community partner - South West Foundation (SWF)

The South West Foundation (as of Jan 2020 [South West Community Matters](#)) is a charity that has community empowerment through research as a core value. The SWF has been running community researcher training since 2007, in some of the most deprived communities in the South West Region. It has trained over 400 community members, both individuals and members of 'under the radar' community groups, to undertake research and communicate research findings to key influencers. This research has contributed to increased activities and community resources (e.g. the development of play facilities and activities for young people; the establishment of community shops and community hubs; and the rescuing of land for community use). The partnership with the University of Bath is the first time that the SWF has worked in collaboration with a university on the CBPR model and brought their experience from community research into the academic environment.

Partnering with the South West Foundation was seen to confer several benefits. First, the SWF had the ability to reach local & community groups who the University would not normally collaborate with and in so doing extend the University's research and relationships. Second, the SWF had expertise in the delivery of research training to community organisations and

in the translation of research findings into local influence. Third, the SWF had trust and influence within the community and so was in a position to broker and manage relationships between the University and community organisations.

## **Funding**

At the commencement of the Community Matters programme, a grant pot totalling £15,000 was made available to voluntary and community sector organisations across BANES. Organisations were invited to apply for a support grant of up to £3,000 to design and deliver their own locally relevant CBPR project. The grants awarded varied between £1,623 and £3000; and were for the purposes of material costs, travel costs, venue costs, additional staff time, and publicity costs. At the end of the programme, all five organisations applied for and received an additional £600 for impact activities.

At the end of the programme, the entire costs totalled £30,600. Of this, £25,600 was invested by the Public Engagement Unit over 3 years and £15,000 was provided in grants direct to the community organisations. It is important to note that some of the costs associated with this pilot programme were not (and possibly could not) have been anticipated at the start. The Public Engagement Unit was in the fortunate position to have flexibility in their budget and so were able to respond to emerging opportunities and needs. The Public Engagement Unit committed £10,000 from its 2015/16 budget: This included a first instalment of £6000 in grants for the organisations, £2,700 for event & training costs, and £1200 in grant management costs paid to South West Foundation. From its 2016/17 budget, the Public Engagement Unit committed £9600, including £6000 for the 2nd instalment of grants, £2,500 for South West Foundation services and £1,100 for training and events. From its 2017/18 budget, the Public Engagement Unit committed £6000 comprising £3000 (£600 per organisation) for follow up, practical projects designed to extend the impact from the research and £3000 for devising a community research toolkit for use by University of Bath researchers. In addition to the above costs, £5000 was provided by the Bath@50 project which was used for the showcase event at the Guildhall.



## The application process

The University's Public Engagement Unit and the South West Foundation developed an agreed set of criteria for the recruitment of community organisations and disseminated, through their networks, a call for applications (see Appendix B: FINAL Criteria Community Matters.pdf). The decision to have community groups bid for funds to answer questions of their choosing was taken to ensure that the community groups were setting the direction from the outset. As part of the call, interested community organisations were encouraged to seek assistance from the South West Foundation in the development of their proposals.

The review panel comprised: Dr Jan Crawley (CEO, South West Foundation), Dr John Troyer (academic champion for Community Matters), Mr Ben Hutchinson (Trusts & Foundations Manager), Dr Helen Featherstone and Mr Ed Stevens (Public Engagement Unit). The key considerations in selecting community organisations were as follows:

1. The community organisations needed to have a research topic that matched one or more of the University's broad research areas.
2. The community organisations needed to demonstrate in their application a commitment to work in partnership with their allocated University researcher and to play an active role in the research process. It was expected that at least one representative of participating groups would attend each of the activity days including planning, training and presentations.
3. The final selection depended on the ability to match research topics with researchers at the University of Bath who had expressed an interest in being involved and who were prepared to make a time commitment both to their community organisation and to wider Community Matters activities (i.e., planning, training and presentation days).

Note: The South West Foundation typically works with 'under-the-radar' groups with incomes of less £10,000 per year and staffed primarily by volunteers. These groups often have difficulty taking advantage of funding calls and so it was decided to not be prescriptive about size.

### Pairing with academic researchers:

The programme proposal suggested targeting early career researchers and / or prize fellows from departments across the University for involvement in the programme. Whilst interdisciplinarity was not mandated it was encouraged to overcome what was perceived as the historical siloing of community research within disciplines. The expectation was that the projects would give researchers real-life experience of managing collaborations; experience that would be transferable to future projects whether these involved collaborations with

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SEARCH BOX

Research

### Unique research collaboration to benefit grassroots community organisations

Voluntary and community organisations based in Bath & North East Somerset are being invited to apply to take part in a unique collaborative research programme with researchers from our University and South West Foundation that could help benefit their local area.

Applications for projects – which could range from anything from the redesign of a local community space to a drive to increase volunteering – will see community groups working alongside academics in the design and delivery of locally-relevant research, to developing their own research capabilities.

The Community Matters Programme has been developed by the University's Public Engagement Unit in part to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the University. It will offer successful applicants the opportunity to take part in a 6-day community-researcher training programme at the start of the summer before the actual research takes place from autumn 2016.

In addition to the opportunity to partner with researchers from right across the University, there is a grant of up to £3,000 available to help organisations with research-related costs.

Dr Helen Featherstone, Head of the Public Engagement at the University explained: "The Community Matters Programme is a truly unique research collaboration through which local organisations can not only tap into funding but also combine their own knowledge and expertise with that of academics to help shape their research projects."

"This might range from anything from exploring why a particular public space is underused – perhaps drawing on expertise in architecture and design from the University – to investigating how to encourage people to get more active – which could involve researchers from the University's Department for Health. By bringing together academics with community organisations in this way we are hoping to see innovative collaborative projects."

Chief Executive at South West Foundation, Jan Crawley, added: "With just over a month to go, I would actively encourage all local organisations in the area to consider applying to take part in the Community Matters Programme. By working together and researching an issue alongside academics from the University, there are really exciting potentials in this initiative."

• To find out more and apply to take part, please contact Jan Crawley at South West Foundation via [j.crawley@southwestfoundation.org.uk](mailto:j.crawley@southwestfoundation.org.uk) or Ed Stevens from the Public Engagement Team [E.Stevens@bath.ac.uk](mailto:E.Stevens@bath.ac.uk).

• Deadline to apply, Friday 11 March.

other researchers or with other non-academic partners. Moreover, by building a cohort approach across the programme, researchers would have the opportunity to make links with like-minded colleagues that could lead to interdisciplinary research collaborations in the future.

#### Anticipated outcomes of involvement

The programme proposal articulated the expected outcomes of benefits for participation in the programme for both community group participants and for academic researchers. Specifically, the suggested benefits for community organisations were to:

- Receive training in research so that they are empowered to undertake their own research in the future;
- Identify and tackle local issues / priorities relevant to their needs;
- Bridge gaps in understanding, knowledge and trust with the University;
- Influence key local stakeholders to bring about change;
- Build sustainable relationships with researchers / departments;
- Access specialist resources, training, and opportunities;
- Have a say in research, rather than having research done on or about them.

...for academic researchers, the suggested benefits were to:

- Gain first-hand experience of managing a CBPR project and all that is associated with this (e.g. project and people management), within a supportive environment;
- Undertake applied research that builds on theory and that has significant local impact;
- Attend a range of professional development sessions and draw on the support of both individuals (e.g. the academic champion, the Public Engagement Unit) and resources throughout the programme;
- Collect higher quality and more useful data through the efficacy of local networks;
- Develop their experience of collaborative research and how to research effectively with 'under-the-radar' groups;
- Raise awareness of their research and its impact amongst local groups;
- Enhance their mandate for turning research findings into action;
- Publish, either in relation to the CBPR process itself or the research project;
- Experience how to translate their research for differing groups;
- Develop research networks for the future;
- Use their research project as a pilot to inform future, larger-scale research grant proposals

### **Project timeline**

Before the research commenced, preparatory workshops were conducted with academic and community groups separately with the objective of helping each group to learn about the other and reflect on what might be some of the challenges in working together. Thus, academic researchers had the opportunity to attend three workshops designed to prepare them for working collaboratively with their community partners. Professor John Diamond conducted a workshop on CBPR as a framework for conducting research and the challenges

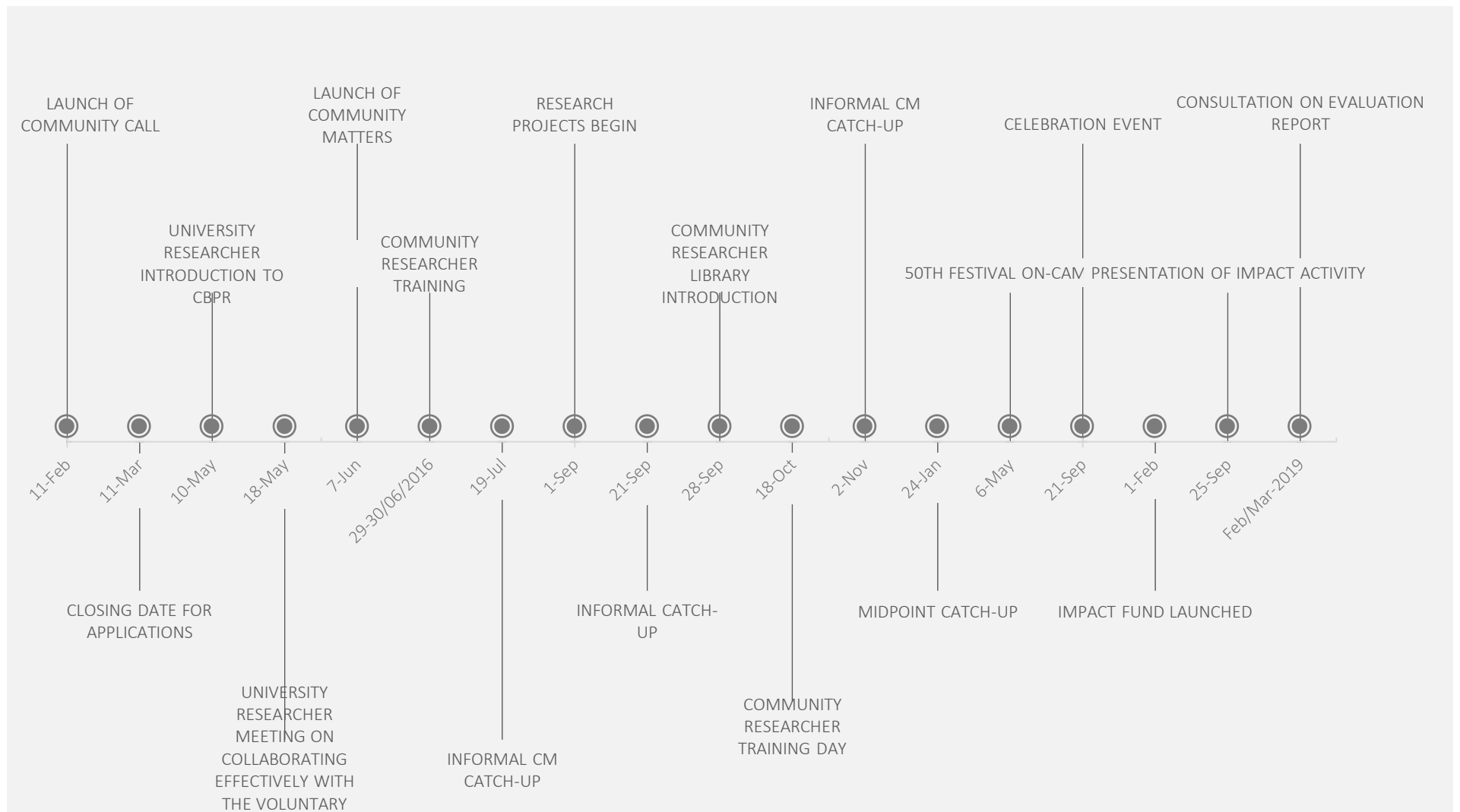
faced from an academic perspective. The South West Foundation conducted a version of their community research training and a workshop on the community sector and how to work effectively with community organisations. Here academics could learn about the funding context within which the community organisations are situated and how this might affect expectations and the ability to engage with the research. In addition, across the period of the programme some University researchers met informally to share their experiences and discuss issues of concern.

Running alongside the above programme of activities, members of voluntary and community sector organisations received training from South West Foundation. At the beginning of the programme this was focussed on understanding the academic context and on the development of research method skills and understanding (e.g., regarding ethical issues). The workshops evolved in response to the needs of the community researchers; for instance, training was provided in dissemination and communication of findings.

Mid-way through the programme, the academic and community researchers were again brought together for a one-day workshop. The morning session was an opportunity to share progress and experiences and to reflect on how to move forward. The afternoon session involved planning for the remainder of the project and a focus on mechanisms for the communication and dissemination of the research.

A celebration event was held in the Bath Guildhall on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2017. Each project team held a stall and gave a presentation on their research outcomes to an audience comprising those key figures in the community who groups wanted to influence. This was a well-attended event including the Mayor and councillors from BANES as well as policy makers, charities, community group members, and members of the public.

In the final stage, each community organisation applied for and received an additional impact grant. The grant provided funding for focused activities that maximized learning from research projects, or that helped create change for organizations and / or their beneficiaries by testing findings from research. The money was not for additional research and their projects did not re-engage with the academics for their activities.



## Key events / activities

- 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Prof John Diamond and Katy Goldstraw (Edge Hill University) conduct a workshop on CBPR with university researchers. This workshop provides CBPR examples, and an opportunity to examine both the benefits to researchers and community and well as the challenges and dilemmas associated with CBPR.
- 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016: The South West Foundation and the Public Engagement Unit conduct a workshop with university researchers on community perspectives on how to conduct 'collaborative' research. This workshop provides contextual background for the voluntary and community sector and how this can affect partnership working.
- 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016: The Community Matters programme is launched at The Edge. Voluntary organisation members and university researchers get together over drinks and light snacks. The purpose is to provide an informal opportunity for all involved to meet one another and find out more about each other's motivations for involvement and their proposed projects.
- 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016: The South West Foundation delivers the first part of a package of training to support voluntary organisation members. This includes training in research skills and methods; understanding ethics in a community research setting; and contextual background on the university sector and how this can affect partnership working.
- 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016: Peter Bradley (Social & Policy Sciences librarian) gives Visiting Research Fellows an introductory session to the Library and e-resources.
- 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016: The South West Foundation provides community training at Southdown Methodist Church. Following consultation with community organisations the day includes facilitated discussions about each group's proposed research methods and challenges; and training by Jenny Wildblood and Leda Blackwood respectively on research methods and ethics.
- 24<sup>th</sup> January 2017: A mid-point catch-up of all community and academic researchers is held at The Edge. This provides an opportunity for projects to update each other on their progress; share experiences of the process; and discuss plans and a 'wish list' for the remainder of their projects.
- March 2017: Clarity CIC, a non-profit company working with social purpose organisations, provides community training on how to create attention grabbing, data rich, infographics.
- 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017: The South West Foundation conducts a workshop on data analysis for the community organisations. This provides a practical opportunity for community organisations to get support in understanding how best to analyse their data.
- 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Clarity CIC provides community training on generating and capturing social impact from community research.
- 21 September 2017: The Community Matters Celebration event is held at the Guildhall in Bath. Community and academic researchers showcased their research at an event involving participants from local communities as well as community authorities including BANES and major charity funders. The event provided an

opportunity to present project outcomes, illustrating the benefit of community collaborations for addressing local issues.

- February 2018: Impact fund is launched with 25 April deadline for applications (scheduled to complete by 31 August). The grant provided funding for focused activities that maximized learning from research projects, or that helped create change for organizations and / or their beneficiaries by testing findings from research. The money was NOT for additional research and community organisations were not required to re-engage with the academics for their activities.
- 25 September 2018: Community organisations presented results of their impact grants at a meeting with the South West Foundation and the Public Engagement Unit.
- April / May 2019: Draft evaluation presented to university and community partner organisations for comment.

### Five projects funded

Thirteen proposals were received from which five organisations were funded: Black Families Education Support Group; Creativity Works; Transition Larkhall; Triumph over Phobia; and Wansdyke Play Association. According to the NCVO's annual Civil Society Almanac, one organisation was under-the radar (i.e., income less than £10k), two were small (i.e. income between £10k and £100k per year) and two were medium (income between £100k & £500k per year).

Black Families Education Support Group: How do young people who attend supplementary school contribute to the community?

[www.educationequals.org.uk](http://www.educationequals.org.uk)

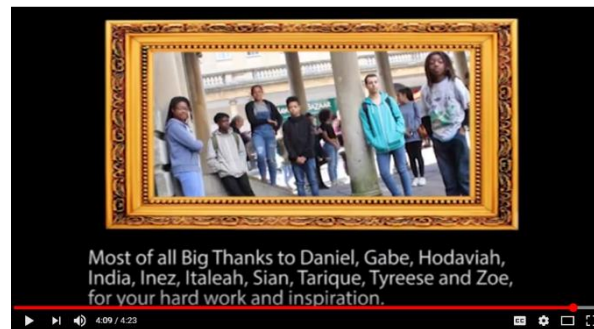
The Research Team: Jason Pegg (Manager), Mark De'Lisser and Emma Milsom (Supplementary School Co-ordinators) from Black Families Education Support Group; and Caroline Hickman (Department of Social & Policy Sciences) and Ioannis Costas Batlle (Department of Education) from University of Bath:

The Black Families Education Support Group is a Supplementary school operating in BANES. Supplementary schools are community-led, 'out of school' education programmes for Black and Minority Ethnic pupils. They offer a wide range of learning activities including core curriculum support, language classes, and cultural and other enrichment activities.

The BFESG's application arose from an established relationship with the University (e.g., providing placements) and was initially viewed as an opportunity to develop a more collaborative research partnership. The BFESG initially described their research objective as to better understand the impact of their programme on students' academic attainment in mainstream school and on students' development of 'character', identity and self-esteem.

This was considered important to improving their own provision and their ability to inform practice in the local education system. It was also hoped that the research would provide evidence for the value and impact of the school to share with key stakeholders.

In keeping with the participatory research principles, the BFESG staff and researchers discussed the initial focus of the project with the young people. After considering a range of questions and perspectives, the initial focus – to understand the impact of the Supplementary School on students' lives – changed. The young people wanted to pursue a different line of thinking; they were tired of being asked 'what does the Supplementary School do for you?' Instead, they wanted to explore 'what do we do for our community?' *The question the students wanted to explore was not what the school does for them, but rather, how young people such as themselves contribute to their community.*



The project used qualitative research methods and collected data through interviews with a small sample of participants (community members); a local authority equality officer, heritage officer, parent and former student. All the interviews were conducted and recorded by young people on film. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and the research findings are documented in a short film.

<https://youtu.be/5ltsxZJWFBc>

*As an organisation we have developed new research skills and gained valuable experience which will allow us to continue to develop our organisation's approach to research and evaluation and support others to carry out their own research, whether this is: supporting young people to carry out research; mentoring other organisations thinking about research; or working to help develop the way we evaluate impact across our sector with funders and other stakeholders. (Jason Pegg, Manager, BFESG)*

The Community Matters research highlighted a relatively hidden outcome of the Supplementary School – its role in supporting young people to have a positive impact in the local community. Based on the research, the BFESG decided to make supporting young people to become active citizens a specific aim of their Supplementary School. The follow-up grant was used for the purpose of running a sports week and residential trip as a part of a new Young Leaders' programme in support of the BFESG's new focus.

Creativity Works: Being Creative: A research project that explores the impact of arts-based peer-led support groups.

<http://www.creativityworks.org.uk/>

The Research Team: Tom Cook (Writing Space Volunteer and Group member), Lynda Tweedie (Creative Perspectives Volunteer and Group member), Oliver Jones (Director), and Philippa Forsey (Creative Wellbeing Manager) from Creativity Works; and Justin Rogers and Megan Robb (Department of Social Work), and Stefanie Gustafsson, (School of Management) from University of Bath.



Creativity Works provides a range of creative activities and courses for people living with mental health challenges or facing difficulties in their lives. It works from the premise that creativity can be empowering and life-changing. Creativity Works emerged from the Wansdyke Arts Council in the 1980s and the North East Somerset Arts in the 1990s. It has been operating in the BANES region in its current form since 2010.

The aim of the project was to collect evidence on the impact of creative peer-led support groups, to explore what influences their impact, and to find areas for improvement to ensure that they can continue to provide a quality service.

The Creativity Works application identified three broad objectives. First, ensuring that the creative and social practices they use are and continue to be cutting edge; second, providing participants (‘experts with lived experience’) with the skills to work alongside staff in evaluating the service; and third, clarifying the impact of the service and articulating this to commissioners, funders, and the wider community.

The research team decided to use creative methods combined with interviews in their research. Volunteers from Creative Perspectives (a visual art peer support group) asked peer group members to create a piece of work expressing what the group meant to them. Similarly, volunteers from Writing Space asked peer group members to produce a written piece of work. Volunteers then explored these creative works and the experience of participating in the peer groups through interviews with group members. This data was then analysed by the wider team; each of the art works and interviews was coded, and then together, the team identified key themes.





The research found that there were four aspects of the peer support groups that service users valued and considered important to the success of these groups. These were engaging in the creative process, establishing social connections, the creation of a valued space and place, and the promotion of self-empowerment.

*The research has given us confidence in articulating the outcomes and benefits of supporting creative peer support groups and in how we work at Creativity Works supporting new ventures with other organisations and funders (Philippa Forsey, Creative Wellbeing Manager, CW)*

The Creativity Works project members have produced a short film <https://vimeo.com/233988064> and a project report. They have also presented their findings at the Community Matters event; an International Conference on culture, health and wellbeing; and the Annual Qualitative Research Symposium at University of Bath. Creativity Works are continuing to work with their academic research partners; they are planning a podcast that explains the project and social work students are undertaking a research project with young people in the organisation.

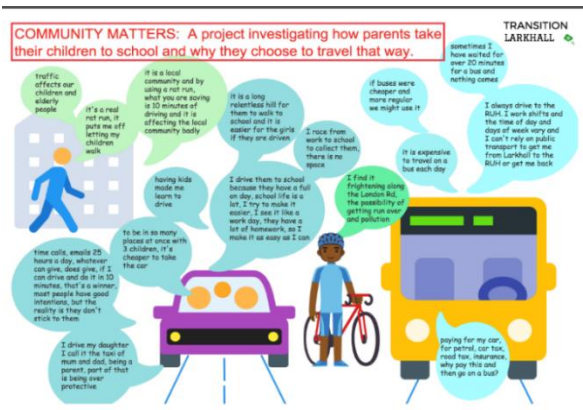
The follow-on grant was used to produce a toolkit which communicates the benefits of the peer support groups; this was designed to be used with both service users and potential funders and commissioners. Creativity Works have also been promoting the involvement of community members and service users in research, to their partner organisations. One of the changes they hope to see is community organisations producing reports on research in a language that is accessible to community members.

Transition Larkhall: How do parents take their children to school and why do they choose to travel that way?

<http://transitionlarkhall.uk/>

The Research Team: Joanna Wright, Ros Hough, Emma Hooper, Miranda Bonham Carter, and Bryn Jones from Transition Larkhall; and Ian Walker (Department of Psychology) from University of Bath; and Shannen Twomey, a film maker from Bath Spa University.

Transition Larkhall was formed in 2009; it is part of the Transition movement which works for a post-oil economy through local communities. Transition Larkhall aims to initiate and promote non-carbon and sustainable living for residents and businesses in and around the Lambridge ward of Bath.



The Transition Larkhall application had a clear outcome in mind; to identify the kinds of drivers who might switch from vehicles to less polluting forms of transport, and to identify the factors that might persuade them to change. By focussing on a particular group (parents transporting children to school) it was hoped that a clearly targeted communication strategy could be devised. Thus, the initial aim of the research was to explore the school run and how best to

encourage parents and children to use more sustainable forms of transport. In discussion with their academic research partner, this initial question was subsequently modified to: How do parents take their children to school and why do they choose to travel that way?

The project used a mixed-methods approach. First, school-related traffic was measured through counting cars both during school term times for schools in the area and outside of school term times. Data collection involved twenty volunteers over a total period of 126 hours. This was followed by 34 semi-structured interviews examining residents' experiences of living in Larkhall. In addition, two community meetings were held at the New Oriel Hall, Larkhall at which findings regarding the level of traffic were presented and community members were invited to comment.

Findings: The research found that traffic during term time was significantly higher than traffic outside term time and that residents perceive traffic and limited transport options to be an issue. Residents spoke of the lack of a reliable and frequent bus service on the East of Bath as a contributing factor to decisions to drive. The research also identified gaps in BANES Council's collection of data that could inform policy making on schooling-related transport.

*The community benefits in Lambridge ward have been remarkable in that the interest generated by the research (and community involvement afterward the project was completed) in school transport, choices made by parents, and the associated environmental costs, raised awareness of local political issues to such an extent that Joanna decided to stand for Councillor, was elected, and is now Joint Cabinet Member for Transport Issues for B&NES. (Ros Hough, TL)*

Information sheets and a short film have been produced and are hosted on the Transition Larkhall website.



<http://transitionlarkhall.uk/estimates/community-matters/>.

In addition, Dr Ian Walker and Dr Nick McCullen are conducting a related piece of work using real-time traffic data to estimate the impact of school terms and holidays on actual journey times within Bath.

The follow-up grant was used to develop an art installation communicating the research findings; this installation has been displayed in a number of visible locations across Bath including Milsom Place and Bath Fringe Arts and has attracted considerable local interest (<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/bath-woman-collecting-25000-toy-1445391>).

On the strength of this research-led campaign, Joanna Wright was interviewed by Wera Hobhouse MP for the Political Slot on Channel4 (6th Dec 2018); selected as the Liberal Democrat candidate for Lambridge Ward in B&NES, which she won; and is now Joint Cabinet member for Transport in B&NES.

Triumph over Phobia: Investigating the factors that affect whether people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) seek therapy or not.

<http://www.topuk.org/>

The Research Team: Trilby Breckman, National Director, TOP U.K; Fran Griffin, Trainee Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner, Wiltshire IAPT Service; and Rebecca Read and Paul Salkovskis, Department of Psychology, University of Bath.

TOP UK runs a network of self-help therapy groups across the UK for sufferers of phobias, OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) and other related anxiety disorders. Triumph over Phobia developed their application with Prof Paul Salkovskis (University of Bath) who had previously acted as advisor to the charity. The outcomes they hoped for were: first, to better understand why people delay accessing help from TOP (and other agencies); second, to improve the evaluation and communication of the effectiveness of their service; and third, to strengthen the relationship with the University and develop further research ideas.

The researchers used questionnaires and interviews to gather data. Participants were recruited from TOP UK groups, anxiety conferences and via the University of Bath website. In total, 77 people with OCD and other anxiety problems participated; 29 were TOP members and 48 were non-TOP members. The results show that in general people who attend TOP UK groups are more satisfied with their treatment when compared with NHS treatments. The results also show that whilst most people prefer individual therapy, most TOP UK members were more positive towards group therapy.



*Working with University of Bath and Professor Salkovskis as part of the Community Matters Project has enriched and inspired all those involved with the charity. The research has given a voice to the service users of TOP UK. Being heard is so important and can help shape the organisation's direction and policy. [Trilby Breckman, National Director, Triumph Over Phobia]*

Following presentation of the research results at the Showcase event in September 2017, TOP were approached by a BANES commissioner and encouraged to join the commissioning process. The follow-up grant was used to create a brochure outlining the benefits of TOP's self-help therapy groups as an alternative to NHS services. This brochure is expected to be used extensively as TOP joins the local commissioning process.

Wansdyke Play: In what way does Wansdyke Play Association's (WPA's) Outdoor, Outreach Play Services impact on the alleviation of play deprivation across the Somer Valley communities?

<http://www.wpa-play.com/>

The Research Team: Stacey Pottinger (Business Development), Stuart Rouse (Play worker), and Will Whisstock (Play worker), from Wansdyke Play Association; and Cathy Randle-Phillips (Department of Psychology) and Anthony Bush, Jessica Francombe-Webb, and Thomas Curran (Department for Health) from University of Bath; and residents (parents/carers and children) living in an area of deprivation in the Somer Valley.

The Wansdyke Play Association was formed in 1993. It works across North East Somerset and Frome, providing free community play events as well as one-on-one family inclusion and play work in targeted areas of disadvantage and deprivation. The WPA's outreach play services aim to support children to be physically active and develop social, emotional and problem-solving skills.

The WPA's application identified three broad objectives. The first was achieving a deeper understanding of social isolation to strengthen existing services and better target potential

service users. The second was having ‘credible’ research that could be used with policy makers and funders. Finally, the third was providing voice to their service users through participation in the research.

The research investigated how families, children and play workers understand the benefits of play as well as the barriers to play. More specifically, the research was interested in how play can provide a valuable developmental opportunity for children in a deprived area and the role of Play Workers in facilitating this process. The research was conducted in Somer

### Overcoming isolation via social interaction

By the end of the sessions the community had moved from low engagement amongst themselves to discussing how they might make changes to their own community.

*“Dad joined in more and led Hockey game with rules set by the children and had at least 12 children playing.” “Some adults noticeably looking for support for themselves and struggling to actively engage with own children. Adults forming a group now – great for social support.” Week 8, Reflective Diary*

*“The community would like to take ownership over the park and inject a new life into it. Updated equipment, better surface and a bench or two.” Families were “Positively and more engaged with children and staff than have previously been. Building relationships with staff and other parents.” Weeks 9&10 Reflective Diary*

Valley with children, parents / guardians and play workers participating in WPA activities. Particularly innovative was the use of ‘go along’ interviews with the young people whilst engaged in play; this was combined with exploring young peoples’ experiences of play through drawing, telling stories and role

plays as well as just talking and playing. In addition, observation of how outdoor spaces were being used were conducted before, during, and after the play intervention; questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were conducted with parents and guardians; and Play Workers kept reflective diaries in which they recorded their experiences and thoughts.

The research found that the WPA’s Outdoor, Outreach Play Services were able to help alleviate play deprivation in this particular Somer Valley community through providing an opportunity for outdoor, active play as well as craft activities which the children wouldn’t otherwise be able to access. Importantly, the play intervention was also found to strengthen relationships within families and within the local community. The barriers to play included both lack of properly managed facilities and spaces (e.g., being unable to access woodlands due to animal faeces) and perceived competition for public spaces (e.g., from older children and for activities such as alcohol and drug consumption).

*“This really gives us an opportunity to have a voice out there because that’s one of the things that we’ve lost. We were trail blazers going back not even that long and then we’ve been so engulfed in local authority contracts. We’ve sort of lost that external voice, we’ve been very embedded in local authority.” (Stacey Pottinger, Business Development Officer, WPA)*

WPA have produced two presentations for different audiences and a short film based on the conclusions <https://youtu.be/vj4w5AO4NAQ>. The follow-up grant was used to work with children to produce a comic strip leaflet about their experiences of play. This comic strip gives voice to children’s experiences and will be used in funding proposals and communications with stakeholders. The project team plan to produce a peer reviewed

academic article showcasing the project. WPA hope to have a blog or article published by Play England and/or other relevant stakeholders.

## What was achieved?

Reflecting on the outcomes against what was anticipated (see p. 5 for full list of anticipated outcomes), the community organisations did receive training in research methods, the resources and opportunity to decide what was researched, and the opportunity to have voice in how the research was conducted. At the conclusion, community organisations reported greater confidence in directing and conducting their own research and some anticipated doing so in the future either alone or in collaboration with academic partners. For their part, academic researchers had the opportunity to learn about CBPR both through formal professional development events and hands-on experience, investigate new research questions and methods, increase their networks in the community and the university, and conduct applied research with local impact.

At the time of writing, members of four community partner organisations continue to have a relationship with the University of Bath, including through membership of departmental advisory bodies, contributions to teaching conducted in the University, hosting placement students in the community, and ongoing dissemination and development of research. As well as the hoped for outcomes of the programme, there have been some unexpected outcomes with some community researchers making substantial changes in their lives. One community researcher has taken up study, another has started a business, and another is now working for a different partner organisation following closure of her own organisation. Perhaps the most unexpected outcome is Joanna Wright from the Transition Larkhall project entering politics and now occupying the position of Joint Cabinet Member for Transport Issues in B&NES.

A fellow community researcher offered this reflection on what the program has meant to her:

*I am very glad to have been a part of the research project - delighted when I see relevant changes, however small, being made in the community and by the bus companies, and also very proud of what Joanna has subsequently achieved. (C1)*

What remains to be seen is the extent to which relationships are sustained beyond the Community Matters programme and the research itself informs local change and future publications and research. The following section provides a summary of the tangible outputs of the Community Matter programme thus far. We then provide details about what each research project achieved; this information is provided by the community organisations and supplemented by their academic researcher collaborators.



### **Research project reports**

Black Families Education Support Group (2018). Community Matters Research Project: Final Report.

Creativity Works (2018). Being Creative: A research project that explores the impact of arts-based peer-led support group.

Wansdyke Play Association (2018). Community Matters Final Report.

Transition Larkhall (2018). Community Matters 2016-2017: How do parents take their children to school and why they choose to travel that way.

Triumph Over Phobia: Seeking Help: A comparison between the NHS and mental health charity.

### **Links to additional materials**

BFESG: <https://youtu.be/5ltsxZJWFBc>

Creativity Works: <https://vimeo.com/233988064>

Transition Larkhall: <http://transitionlarkhall.uk/estimates/community-matters/>

Wansdyke Play Association: <https://youtu.be/vj4w5AO4NAQ>

### **Conference papers and engagement activities**

Costas Batlle, I., Blackwood, L., & Stevens, E. (2018). Celebrating the imperfections of community-based research. Abstract from Living Knowledge, Budapest, Hungary.

Rogers, J., Robb, M., Gustafsson, S., Forsey, P., Jones, O., Tweedie, L. and Cook, T., (2018) 'Minding the Gap: Reflections on Relationality and Positionality in Community Based Participatory Research' South West Qualitative Research Symposium, Bath, United Kingdom

Rogers, J., Robb, M., Gustafsson, S., Forsey, P., Jones, O., Tweedie, L. and Cook, T., (2017) 'Co-production and progression opportunities in Mental Health Creative Support Services', International Conference on Culture, health and wellbeing, Bristol City Hall, United Kingdom

## Part 2 -Experiences of participating in *Community Matters*

### Participants' expectations and reflections on the experience

University and community partners came to the Community Matters initiative via different routes. Some responded to the calls made by the Public Engagement Unit and South West Foundation, whilst others were directly approached by these organisations or by individuals within the university or community sector with whom they had an existing relationship. In one instance, the community partners were volunteered by a member of their organisation and only learned of their involvement when their organisation's bid was successful. Reflecting these diverse beginnings (as well as the novelty of the initiative), there was initially some uncertainty amongst university and community partners about what their participation would entail and what therefore might be the potential benefits (and / or challenges).

Notwithstanding this complexity, it was possible to discern three broad motivations that map onto the programme outcomes articulated in the research proposal: (a) creating real-world change, (b) professional and community capacity development; and (c) developing relationships and networks. In this section we examine each of these from the perspectives of academic and community researchers. We end this section with a discussion of some of the challengers and lessons learned from the programme.

Note: In order to protect people's identities a notation system is used for quotes: A=academic researcher; C=Community researcher; the number refers to order of interviewees in each category.

#### (a) Creating 'real-world' social change (doing it for the community)

Common ground amongst university and community partners was the hope that through their participation in Community Matters they would contribute to some 'real-world' change in the local community. Indeed, what was striking was the degree to which this value was shared and described as the central motivation and indeed central to people's identity. As one community researcher explained, 'my reason to do the things I do is to change the world' (C2). In a similar vein, one university researcher described their decision to participate as an obvious choice.

*We should be a good neighbour []. Why wouldn't you get involved with something like this? If someone comes to me as an academic and says "Look, there's a chance here to use what you know to help the local community", I don't know why you wouldn't say yes (A2).*

There were, however, some important differences in terms of how participants understood their social change values and more specifically the role played by research.



### ***The academic perspective***

Among the academic researchers, a belief in the power of research to bring about social change and make a difference to communities was frequently expressed as a given. But, there was also reflection on the ways in which the role of research in social change is typically discussed in terms of national and international impact; and how the relationship between research efforts and social change is often distal in time and indirect. Whilst some academic researchers spoke of the potential of the Community Matters programme to contribute to long term change (e.g., through providing fresh insights and partnerships), all spoke of the appeal of being able to focus on small-scale change in their local community.

*“It’s not gonna get me on Question Time. It’s not going to get policy change at Westminster. And yet it is research that I think and I believe makes a huge difference on the ground to real, really marginalised disenfranchised groups of people”. (A1).*

Moreover, for some, the focus of attention was not just on change ‘out there’ but on change within the academy; the belief that supporting the local community should be part of the university identity and the hope that the Community Matters programme might contribute to a new relationship between town and gown.

*“people just don’t realise Universities are here as a useful resource and we’re desperate to be used as one, and so a demonstration of that I think is one of the things that I’m quite keen to happen. You know, I’d love people to be more aware of that because nothing is more interesting to me than people knocking on my door saying can you help with something [...] I think it should be part of our job, I think it should be in our workload it should be something it should be one of the things we do” (A2)*

### ***The community perspective***

For community partners, their identities as agents of social change were aligned with the values and goals of their community organisations; and the potential value of the Community Matters programme was thus seen primarily in terms of addressing tangible organizational objectives. These objectives took several forms and were often interrelated. Of immediate importance was the sustainability of the organisation. Thus, the need to provide an evidence base to influence policy makers and secure funding was a central motivating factor; and indeed, for some, the lure of £3000 was sufficient. Reflecting the funding context in which community organisations compete for limited resources and are expected to provide evaluations for all funded activities, the



imprimatur of university research was seen as conferring real benefits and even bestowing a competitive advantage.

*“How do you show impact? How do you measure an outcome of some mud painting? [...] And especially when we’ve only been able to deliver short interventions because of the contracts we’ve been on. So, to have some form of validation or even just to learn how to really measure and voice the impact that we’re making would be hugely beneficial in terms of funders” (C5).*

This is not to say that more intrinsic benefits of research were not valued. Indeed, a number of the community partners did come with an interest in stepping back from their activities and understanding ways in which they could better understand and support their community of interest. For those that did not, this sometimes emerged as one of the unexpected benefits.

*“We learnt a lot about how to do research which is really important and very valuable for the future. And it was great for us to be able to have that time to work as a team; so I think we got to know our own practice much deeper.” (C10)*

## **(b) Professional and community capacity development**

Academic and community researchers all expressed excitement (sometimes tinged with anxiety) about the potential for learning through the Community Matters programme. Early in the programme, academic and community researchers were introduced to the specific training programme designed to support them. Although this may have signalled the learning that was expected of them, there was some ambiguity about the shape that learning and development might take. The fact that this programme was new perhaps contributed to this ambiguity; at least at the very start.

### ***The academic perspective***

The notion that we need to develop researchers’ knowledge and skills in conducting research in and with community organisations is rarely recognised (Belone et al., 2016). This was, however, an explicit objective of the Community Matters programme; learning about CBPR and about the community sector and the political and funding context in which they are operating were incorporated in the programme.

It is perhaps to be expected that how individual researchers engaged with the explicit focus on the CBPR approach would, at least in part, reflect prior experience and their existing attitudes and values towards this approach. This certainly seemed to be the case. Some academics had been using traditional models of conducting research in (rather than with) communities successfully for many years. They tended to be more equivocal about the

programme's emphasis on CBPR and, at least initially, saw it as not relevant to them and a needless distraction:

*“it felt like there was sort of quite a lot of talking and at that point I just wanted to get on and do something [] but I think it might be fair to say there were other people in the room that probably did want to hear what was being said. I got the feeling there were sort of younger people who'd not done anything at all like this who seemed to find it useful” (A2)*

By contrast, some (typically early career researchers) were drawn to the Community Mattes programme by the promise of developing their knowledge and skills in CBPR specifically. Thus some (not all) saw benefit from the professional development training, the opportunity to share learning and resources, and to stretch themselves. But, it was in the actual doing of the research in collaboration with community partners where academic researchers said most learning occurred. One researcher who came with some prior experience working with communities described moments of surprise where he had gained a deeper appreciation of the benefits of collaboration to the quality of the research. Here he reflects on the ways in which the process had built his confidence in conducting research with volunteers working with service users.

*“It was a powerful realisation half way through the project that we were really onto something. It struck me that this co-produced project with volunteers from the organisation undertaking interviews wasn't just a nice thing to be doing; it was an approach that really yielded powerful research data.” (A4)*

Another academic researcher reflected on how she would have done a different and less impactful project had she not had the initial discussions with her community partners and started to work collaboratively with them. She also reflected on how this approach had given her access to the expertise of her community partner in a way she had not anticipated.

*“I thought I'd be able to just draw upon some things I already knew [] and actually there's a whole literature base that's completely new to me which (community researcher) opened my eyes to and she's so au fait with.” (A6)*

### ***The community perspective***

A clearly articulated goal of the programme was to provide community organizations with the skills to ask their own research questions and conduct their own research. Indeed, this is regarded as the gold standard of CBPR. It is therefore noteworthy that at the commencement of the programme, few of the community members identified research skills development as a motivating factor.

What was most novel in the Community Matters programme was the delivery by South West Foundation of a dedicated programme of research skills training and development. The SWF's research skills training has typically been for very small community groups and the focus has been on basic research design and analysis. On the Community Matters programme, some of the groups were larger and more established and had some experience of research for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, the research approaches across the projects required community researchers to come to grips with a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Although the SWF was able to recalibrate its training in response to the needs of the community researchers, the diverse needs and abilities within the group were a challenge.

This is not to say that the SWF research training as well as the more informal training provided by university research partners was not valued; indeed, it was and some participants described it as a revelation in a number of senses. First, although some community researchers had undergraduate and sometimes postgraduate training, at the beginning of the programme, most lacked confidence in their own research capabilities. It was experienced as a revelation therefore to discover that the research process is not a mysterious art form.

The second was in the unexpected benefits of taking the time to step back from their work and systematically examine their organization's activities. One community researcher spoke of this as "coming up for air" (C10) another as "processing space" (C1). But, more than mere reflection, what was noted was the greater self-confidence in being able to champion the community organisation's working model.

*"I feel like I can stand [] more confidently in some of those meetings that I'm constantly in on because I'm sitting in, I sit on [] meetings for a lot of my work time with health professionals. So I feel more confident." (C10)*

Finally, some community researchers also spoke of how their own involvement had kindled their interest in research and pursuing further study. For instance, one community volunteer had approached the Arts Council about funding to do research on art in healing (C12). Others spoke of how, within their community organisation they had gained deeper appreciation for each other's capabilities and witnessed the personal growth of service users engaged in the research. For instance, here we have a description of one service user's experience of having his contribution to the research analysis process validated:

*"He walked higher when he walked out, you know. He was so proud to be part of it. And he said to me afterwards I feel really great to be part of this and thank you so much for asking me." (C10).*

At the end of the programme, there was clear expression of greater confidence in research skills and some participants expressed the intention to continue conducting research as a part of a process of continuous improvement within their organization. What was also clear, however, was that this greater confidence did not diminish the importance of continuing to collaborate with University researchers for both their expertise and legitimacy. In terms of the former, no matter how equal and empowering the collaborative relationship was judged to be, this was premised on respect for what each partner could bring to the table.

*“As much as I’ve spoken about everyone being on a level playing field and everyone having equal authority in the room [] we were the experts in creativity and holding our participants and they have the expertise in what is research and how do we go about it.” (C11).*

In terms of the latter, the legitimacy brought by the university was considered especially important where the purpose of the research was to influence external agencies (e.g., funders and policy makers). Indeed, a key motivation for participation in the programme and one that remained to the end was the public kudos and authority that working with the University brings.

*“I’m hoping for a piece of (laughter) that can be rubber-stamped and we can say... because collaborative work is important to a lot of funders, they like collaboration. I think if we can say we’ve done some collaborative research with the University of Bath it sounds great, doesn’t it? Yes so that you know it gives us a bit more status and standing and will help with our funding” (C4)*

### **(c) Building relationships and networking**

A key objective of the Community Matters initiative was to help academics develop their networks both across the University and with community organisations. The involvement of the South West Foundation was premised in part on an understanding of the importance of community organisations, which are often quite isolated, also having the opportunity to develop networks. This was more important as a motivator for early career researchers and some community researchers and less so for senior academic researchers.

#### ***The academic perspective***

When discussing the impact Community Matters could have on the University, academic researchers described motivations relating to relationships; firstly, building networks within the University and with community organisations for the purposes of research; and secondly, improving the reputation of the University with the BANES community. Importantly, the latter was considered important both for instrumental reasons of facilitating research as well as for more symbolic reasons such as wanting to feel pride in the University.

The objective of assisting early career researchers in the development of their networks both within and external to the University was explicitly articulated in the Community Matters proposal and in calls for expressions of interest from academics. Various events provided the opportunity for university researchers to meet and discuss their research projects with one another and there were informal meetings that some academic researchers attended in the Claverton Rooms (staff cafeteria). Whilst the intention had been to further facilitate networking through the establishment of interdisciplinary teams, this was only achieved for two of the community projects. Both instances involved early career researchers who did not have (a) established expertise in the research area of direct relevance to the project; and (b) a prior relationship with their community partner organisation. The experience of interdisciplinarity was generally viewed positively by members of these two groups in terms of providing an opportunity to identify synergies in research interests as well as to learn from one another.

*“[] networking within the University and working with people from other departments who, actually, when we sat down, have very similar kind of research interests and there’s huge kind of crossovers actually in the work that we’re doing but just from a different theoretical basis. [...] So that’s been [...] really useful”. (A3)*

### ***The community perspective***

Building networks and relationships was less obviously a focus for community organisations at the outset. Yet, this was clearly an outcome for some community researchers and one that they valued. Some community groups assisted one another in very practical ways; for instance, helping with recruitment or with data collection. Community researchers also derived inspiration from one another, *“their kind of passion for their community really shone through and I think that I really took on board that kind of learning about how passionate everybody was about what they were doing”* (C10). But, what was particularly valued was the recognition of shared values and struggles in a context where organisations find themselves atomised by the requirement to compete with one another for funding.

*“The more we could bridge those gaps and have the opportunity to talk to each other and find out that, in some ways, we’re all struggling with the same things. And in other senses we might be able to help each other solve the problems too just having a network of other people”* (C5)

In terms of the relationships between academic researchers and their community partners it is perhaps too soon to know in what ways some of these might be sustained and develop. At the time of writing, in one case where there was a pre-existing relationship it was felt that the relationship had strengthened through more genuine collaboration and there was an expectation of continuing to work together. In another case where again, there was a pre-existing relationship, closer collaboration had led to difficulties in the relationship and once the project completed there was a parting of the ways. Finally, in other cases new relationships were formed and were already leading to new collaborations:

*“He’s a real champion of our work now actually. He sends stuff through saying oh this will be interesting for you or he talks to people about us and he really kind of gets it. He’s a fantastic champion for our work and we’ve now started doing another project with his department as well”. (C11)*

It is important to note that continuing collaboration can never be an expectation placed on academic and community partners. Indeed, in recognition of this, emphasis was given to the importance of thinking about and planning for the ‘ending’ of the project, and the potential to either go separate ways or continue contact. The impact grants could in some ways be seen as providing an ending for community organisations; this was funding for activities that, whilst based on the research, were explicitly practical and non-academic.

## Challenges and lessons learned along the way

The purpose of Community Matters was to support community and university partners to explore new ways of working together. Thus, the Community Matters programme could be described as inherently challenging and, for the most part, this is what participants knowingly signed up for. What was initially described as most challenging was the development of the partnership relationship when *“we all come from different worlds and don’t understand each other”* (A2), and the negotiation of roles within those partnerships. As the research progressed, both academic and community researchers experienced pressures to with time and resources as well as challenges related to their other accountabilities. These issues are explored below followed by lessons that have been gleaned from this evaluation.

### (a) Coming from different worlds and the legacy of unequal relations

The sense of coming from different worlds was strong for many participants; but not all. The community partners were expected to develop skills in research and so the burden of learning about the others’ world was arguably greater for them. Moreover, the expectation that community partners step into the academic world through their active engagement in all stages of the research process meant that their perceptions of academics and their meta-perceptions of how academics perceived them were often particularly salient and a source of anxiety. Academics were variously described by some as clever, intimidating, ‘shiny people’ (C2). Describing the first meeting as scary, one community researcher explained:

*“I was thinking God, I haven’t been on a University campus for years and um, and everybody’s going to be very clever and I’m gonna feel like an idiot.” (C5)*

People’s initial fears were eventually dispelled and the ways in which this was described was sometimes revealing. For instance, one community participant described his relief at discovering that his academic research partner was not “an unfunny even morose figure who had no experience of the real world and conducted themselves with an air of superiority” (C11). Nonetheless, there was an awareness of a power imbalance between



community and university and the focus on research accentuated this; there was a far greater expectation that community researchers enter the world of the academic than the reverse. This was one area where the South West Foundation and its organisation of community only spaces proved particularly helpful.

*We can talk about our difficulties and perhaps give them voice and perhaps things that you hadn't even put into words or a thought could somehow come out because you were in this focussed space. It was safe with the South West Foundation and it was different.*  
(C9)

What may have been more challenging for some academic researchers was recognition of the ways in which they were regarded. As well as the perceptions described above, from the perspective of community organisations largely dependent on volunteers and struggling with limited resources there was sometimes a perception of academics as being both powerful and resource rich. This did not always accord with academics' own view of themselves; this was perhaps particularly apposite for early career researchers who reflected on tensions between the expectations of their job and not wanting to let their community partners down.

Some community organisations too came with a legacy of negative prior experience of working with academics. Even where they did not, there was a shared narrative of academics "parachuting in and getting what they need" (C8) for their research agendas and not giving anything in return. The premise of initiatives such as Community Matters is that negative experiences of exploitation by researchers have soured the relationship between universities and communities. However, whilst it is one thing to understand this in an abstract sense, it is another to recognise the work needed to keep developing trust against these experiential backgrounds. Whilst the following experience was with another University, it was salient to this community researcher when reflecting on her positive experience with Community Matters.

*"We did the research, they took the analysis away and presented it back to us in a report that we could barely read. It was good, but it was research speak and we kind of looked at it and we were like, well, what are we going to do with this. You've asked us about our process, we've told you about the process and given us a report that we can't give back to our people."* (C10)

There were two key decisions made in the Community Matters programme that were regarded as important to establishing trust with community partner organisations. The first was the University's decision in June 2016 to provide Visiting Research Fellow status to one member of each community organisation. Community organisations were invited to nominate a community researcher and a University process was put in place to consider their CVs and award Visiting Research Fellow status. Initially, there were five applicants who were each confirmed. Due to demand a further four were considered; thus there were nine



Visiting Research Fellows in total. The University's decision to provide this recognition -- and access to resources that went with it -- was described by both academic and community partners alike as a turning point where the community partners felt that the University was committed and was taking them seriously. The second, was the University's decision in early 2018 to provide community partner organisations with the opportunity to access follow-on funding. All community organizations welcomed these grants and what may have been symbolically important was the signalling of a no-strings-attached commitment to supporting them in promoting their valued outcomes; community organisations were free to involve their university partners or not as they wished.

### **(b) What is this we're doing? (negotiating roles)**

In framing the CBPR approach at the commencement of the programme, academics were encouraged to think about a range of potential roles from consultant through to critical friend. It was made explicit and repeated throughout the process that the role the researcher took needed to be negotiated within each group project. This was something that academic researchers and community members alike spoke of as presenting a challenge; as disrupting their assumptions about the partnership relationship. Thus, deliberate ambiguity within the CBPR model presented some initial confusion in terms of lack of role clarity:

*"I'm comfortable with whatever the role is but at the moment it's not explicit so I'm comfortable with being an expert who comes in and does something; I'm comfortable with being a consultant; I'm comfortable with being someone who just sits up here and they run ideas past me. I'm comfortable with being just someone who looks over documents for them. Any of these are fine. I've done them all before. But at the moment I don't think we know which one is which". (A2)*

It is important to note that the specific approach favoured by academic researchers and their community partners (e.g., expert versus equal) did not appear to determine the perceived success or otherwise of the project nor how participants spoke of their enjoyment of the process. Indeed, community organisations were familiar with the traditional model of academic as expert and whilst some expected to be able to challenge that expertise and assert their own, others did not. Moreover, expectations changed across the research process. One community member (C6) described the beginning as *"almost sort of like a bit of a dance of how much they (.) advise or you know"*. There were also times when community researchers expressed difficulties when the academic was seen to relinquish their expert role or require too much research input from the community organisation. By the same token, one academic researcher spoke of how she sometimes struggled to assert her expertise in a real-world context where one's training in *'muddying the waters'* might not be welcome (A6).

The model of equal partners required more of the relationship and, where it was successful, appeared to bring the clearest rewards in terms of mutual learning. What mattered most,

however, was that whatever arrangement was reached within each of the groups, was agreeable to all parties. This observation underlines the frequently made point that a 'one-size fits all' model of collaborative partnerships will not suit everyone.

### **(c) Under pressure (Is this core business?).**

For some academic researchers, the motivation to contribute to social change at the local, community level was consistent with their professional identities as researchers and was experienced as relatively unproblematic. One important factor appeared to be whether their research values were validated within their discipline. Thus, some of those who were working in disciplinary areas where community-based research is more typical (e.g., social work and areas of clinical and health psychology which have been influenced by the PPI framework) recognised the Community Matters programme as a comfortable fit.

Others, however, expressed some ambivalence; whilst drawn to the programme as an opportunity to do research in accordance with their values, there was some hesitation occasioned by believing it was not valued by line-managers and the university. Seniority may be an important factor to consider here. Whilst the university targeted ECR's for the Community Matters programme, several ECRs spoke of having been cautioned by supervisors against involvement; and indeed, one senior academic researcher on the programme explained that he had discouraged ECRs from participating.

*“There were a couple of my staff within the [] team who would have liked to have joined in but actually we couldn't reconcile it with the other demands. Particularly the probationary demands because it isn't recognised which is interesting. So, the university wants the badge but not well, well I don't know, you can speculate can't you”. (A7)*

What was clear at the outset and throughout the process was that the involvement of community partners was always contingent on believing that the research would be instrumental in furthering the organisation's social change objectives; and that the potential contribution of the research to these objectives, warranted the diversion of limited organisational resources from core social change activities. That is to say, for community organisations there was a very clear bottom line.

*“At the moment, we've got like two grand in the bank and we're trying to run an organisation. We need to improve really how we approach funders and what evidence we've got for our work, so the more we can have proper evidence-based research, the more we might be able to improve the service that we can offer.” (C4)*

For some community researchers this sometimes created a tension, highlighting the importance of academic researchers understanding and being sensitive to the position occupied by community researchers within their organisations. One academic researcher described how she had not anticipated that the challenges community organisations face to

survive would influence the research; she had expected such concerns to be “background noise” (A6, p.3 T2). It was through the informal conversations over cups of coffee where she came to understand that this was not the case.

*“You could almost feel like a more kind of emotional strain that she felt as she was being torn between the community needs, the organisational needs and then when we came in and added to that, the research needs.” (A6).*

The academic researcher above spoke of her sense of guilt that she might not be able to meet the organisations expectations and her decision in the end to give more time than she felt she should or that the university would recognise. But as well as her own personal sacrifice, she spoke of the community researcher too as emotionally invested in the research and “doing stuff that wasn’t really her role”. Thus, personal relationships and shared belief in the importance of the research to the lives of people affected by the project were important to people’s ability to sustain their commitment to the project through difficult times. This was sometimes in contexts where support was not perceived to be forthcoming from within one’s own organisation.

#### **(d) Minding external accountabilities**

Related to the above, a challenge in partnership working was ensuring that the research approach aligned with or at least did not violate either partner’s professional identities or external accountabilities. Members of both groups, at one point or another, experienced anxieties about relinquishing their specific expertise and what this would mean for themselves and their organisations. For academic researchers, this anxiety was sometimes felt where there was the anticipation of tension between the community partner’s desire for evidence (or ‘proof’) of something and the demands of academic rigor.

*“We know you can’t prove things, whereas charities constantly demand ‘prove something. Prove this works’. Whereas, in fact, as we know, all you can ever do is fail to disprove it works. We can maybe help you gather evidence to explore something, we can help you gather evidence that might support a point of view.” (A7)*

What was also expressed was concern that due to the pressure for community organisations to ‘prove their worth’, the research might get done badly (see below) and that such pressures may prevent community organisations doing the research that allows them to learn and develop “there isn’t scope to say ‘Ah this isn’t – this hasn’t worked, let’s try something different’ (A6).

*“Every group that’s come has got some problem they want to solve. If the research gets done badly, or half-heartedly, they might either misunderstand their problem, and therefore be left with it, or be trying to treat their problem the wrong way and or that they might lose credibility. Just as the University could lose credibility.” (A2)*

For community researchers, there were also anxious moments about compromising their external accountabilities. One area where this was experienced was in relation to providing access to members of their community; particularly where these members had prior negative experiences with institutions or were perceived to be in some way vulnerable. For instance, community partners expressed concerns around demands placed on service users and the potential for the research process to in some way alienate or harm the relationship the service users had with the organisation.

*I s'pose we know the young people come of their own accord. They don't have to be there so it's keeping them interested (.) it's finding work that they want to really be part of (.) and stuff like that and I suppose it's just getting that understanding (C8).*

In some cases, previous experiences with academic researchers meant that some community organisations began with low expectations of the researchers' consideration and respect for the organisation and its community. In such cases there was a particular imperative for academic researchers to demonstrate both commitment and respect for organisational boundaries, in order to build trust.

## Lessons learned

Below, we identify a number of lessons that may inform the University and Public Engagement Unit's development of future collaborative research initiatives.

### The value of a structure and community broker

Many of the issues identified in this report speak to the central importance of building relationships of trust founded on mutual understanding and respect between academic and community researchers. Whilst much of this 'emotional' work happened within the projects themselves, the Public Engagement Unit and the South West Foundation provided a framework to support this process. Most obviously, were the early activities bringing all groups together. But there were also points on some projects when there was a risk of relationships breaking down and more concerted intervention was needed. Indeed, there were several points in the programme where it was doubtful that all five projects would complete. Whilst we cannot comment on whether these projects should have or would have continued had they not been embedded within Community Matters the fact that they all did can at least partially be attributed to not only the efforts of the project partners themselves but to the support they found from others. It was in such moments that the presence and added value of third parties within a shared overarching process described by one community researcher as "a very large bubble" (C10), was most apparent.

Unlike many CBPR projects which are conducted in isolation, the Community Matters initiative facilitated and oversaw five partnerships. This bringing together of different CBPR projects was a significant strength. It proved most valuable in providing community groups with additional sources of support and learning; as well as an opportunity for collective voice. In terms of the South West Foundation specifically, many community (and some

academic) researchers commented that its role should not be underestimated. What proved valuable was not only the skills training for community researchers, but the presence of a trusted community organisation that could act as broker and gatekeeper; ensuring that the needs and interests of small community organisations were considered:

*She (Jan Crawley, SWF) was, I felt like she was the broker between the university and us in a way, although we had extremely, we, as a group have had an extremely positive experience with the university, but you would imagine that if you hadn't have done, she would have been there to help iron out anything. She's been an amazing alongside partner. (C10)*

***L1: Providing a structure for the development of long-term community relationships (as opposed to short-term project-based collaboration), and working with community organisations that can provide a brokering / gatekeeper role, is vital to enhancing (or protecting) both the community and the university's reputations.***

### **Clear articulation of organisational commitment**

The University's investment in the Community Matters pilot was considered by some to constitute a sufficient expression of commitment to community-based research. Yet, it was clear from senior academics as well as the early career researchers targeted that this did not always mesh with people's understanding of what is truly valued. Speaking about what should be valued outcomes of Community Matters, one ECR made the following observation.

*It's not just about number or products. It's also about giving this clear message of value to these projects and saying you're engagement with this piece of work is of enormous value to us. Your ideas, your thoughts, your involvement, even if it's messy, even if it doesn't go perfectly. Because I think a lot of the reason academics shy away from this type of research is it's messy (A1).*

Clearly there will be differences across the University and across disciplines; but even in those areas where researchers are legitimately concerned with questions within communities, this research was considered risky to people's careers (particularly for ECRs). Aside from the potential negative impact on academic researchers' careers, one outcome of perceiving community-based research to be risky and undervalued is that the research may suffer and result in just the kinds of practices that leave communities feeling exploited.

***L2: If the university is committed to developing academic researchers' skills and networks for working within communities then (a) clearer communication about the importance of support and recognition at all levels (including from line managers) is needed; and (b) consideration needs to be given to what this means in a context where investment in CBPR may not meet short-term objectives (e.g., REF publications).***

## Recognising time of academic and community researchers

The importance of relationships to successful collaborative research brings to the fore an issue that all participants raised and that rarely receives the attention that is due -- the matter of time. The Community Matters programme ran longer than anticipated. The fact that all five projects completed is remarkable and due in no small part to the willingness of academic and community researchers to give far more time than was budgeted for or envisaged. This expenditure of time was a stress factor for academic and community researchers alike. Academic researchers experienced stress in managing their sense of obligation to the community organisation and the project and the expectations of their employer. For community organisations, volunteers' time is a valued resource and one they can ill afford to mismanage. Facer and Enright (2016) suggest that the importance of the intangible resource of time to collaborative research should be considered equivalent to the importance of supercomputers to big data analysis. We would echo this argument.

***L3: The allocation of time for academic researchers to develop community partnership research and the funding of community researcher time would send a strong signal that the University recognises and values this work.***

## Committing resources in the community

As is typical in the community sector, community organisations were in some cases operating on very tight budgets and in a context where future funding is rarely secure. Indeed, at the time of writing this report, one community partner has now ceased operation due to lack of funding. The small grants received by the community partners was critical to making the research feasible and for conferring value. Moreover, it was salutary to observe how much the community partners were able to do with very little. At the same time, a criticism could be levelled at the Community Matters model replicating the wider project-based funding model which pits community organisations in competition with each other and risks creating short-termism and mission creep as each chases new funding streams. Careful attention does, therefore, need to be paid to how the University can provide more sustained support for the development of longer-term research partnerships and guard against undermining the sustainability of organisations (e.g., when diversion of community organisation resources is at the expense of core activities).

Once again, the role of the SWF was critical in bringing resource difficulties to light with the university, as well as supporting community organisations in seeking funding solutions. At a very pragmatic level the SWF was able to take responsibility for managing the grants, thus averting a common risk of small community organisations with limited cash flows dealing with University payment systems (Facer & Enright, 2016). What also worked well was the bestowment of Research Fellow status on community researchers. This provided access to a unique set of resources that the University holds and that community organisations highly value. One question asked by several academic and community researchers at the end of the programme was about the feasibility of continuing the Research Fellow status. This was

considered more commensurate with a long-term commitment to the local community and to the development of enduring partnerships.

***L4: Whatever approach the university takes in the local region, it must ensure that (a) the University's systems do not risk the viability of small community organisations; and (b) that the objective is long term partnership that can contribute to rather than undermine community-wide capacity building.***

### **Recognising diversity within academia and the community**

When involving academic researchers in programmes such as this it is important to consider that this is by no means a homogenous group. For instance, in the Community Matters programme, some more senior academic researchers showed less affiliation with the CBPR model and developed the research partnership in line with their own areas of research interest and expertise. Others engaged more with the CBPR model and as a consequence conducted research that was outside of their interests and where they had less expertise. These different orientations (as well as differences in career stage) may well have consequences for the outcomes in terms of publication and further research development. One early career academic researcher who was very committed to the CBPR approach expressed regret that whilst much had been achieved in terms of reports and presentations, he and his collaborators had not found the time to produce academic outputs: *"The work is there but the space to get it over the line and finish it with a journal article has just passed us by, it's such a shame"* (A4).

What also needs to be considered is the diversity of research methods favoured by academic researchers and community researchers and the potential for disagreement about what constitutes 'scientific' method and more specifically, the CBPR's embracing of multiple methods. One issue is the potential for contestation among academic researchers and for this in turn to cause confusion or anxiety for community researchers. Whilst exposure to diverse research methods was a boon for some academic and community researchers for others it was a source of tension.

***L5: A key insight from this evaluation (and one that many reports have identified previously) is the importance of not taking a one size fits all approach to community partnership research. In developing approaches at UoB it will be important to be informed by research on the specific community context and the needs of community organisations within our region as well as the context and needs of academic researchers at different stages of their careers.***



## Appendix 1

### Evaluation research

This evaluation research examines the experience of Community Matters from the perspectives of key stakeholders including members of the UoB Public Engagement Unit, the South West Foundation, and community and university researchers participating in each of the 'Community Matters' projects. The purpose was to conduct an evaluation of the programme that is (a) reflexive and informed by all parties; (b) considers process as well as intended and unintended outcomes; and (c) identifies learning that can inform UoB's approach to supporting community-based research.

The design of the evaluation was informed by consultation and negotiation with the Public Engagement Unit and the South West Foundation. The latter held the position of gatekeepers to the community organisations; consideration was given to what was feasible in terms of limited resources within community organisations and the preferences and capacity of all those involved.

The research therefore entailed a mix of ethnography (document analysis and participant observation) and interviews / focus groups with participants in the programme including members of the Public Engagement team, the SWF Director and trainer, members of each of the community organisations, and the academic researchers partnered with each community organisation.

- Document analysis (e.g., project description, applications, and progress reports). The evaluation researcher was given access to all documents pertaining to the programme.
- Ethnographic observation at key events. The evaluation researcher conducted participant observation research at all events involving both academics and community members. The SWF expressed a preference that skills training events provided to community organisations be 'academic free' to provide a 'safe space' for community members.
- Interviews / focus groups. The purpose of interviews was to identify expectations prior to participation; compare this with people's actual experiences; and examine the processes involved in making sense of the experiences and outcomes of participation. One set of interviews / focus groups was conducted by the evaluation researcher in the early to mid-phases of the project. A second set of interviews, combined with memory stories and visual art pieces, was conducted towards the end of the programme (November 2017 – January 2018) as part of the Public Engagement lead's PhD research examining the implications of CBPR for learning, professional identities and social change. In light of SWF concerns that community members not be overburdened by requests to participate in evaluative research, permission was sought and given by all interviewees to make the latter set of interview transcripts available for the evaluation.



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