

## Knowledge for Change Workshop: The Value of Community Involvement with Research

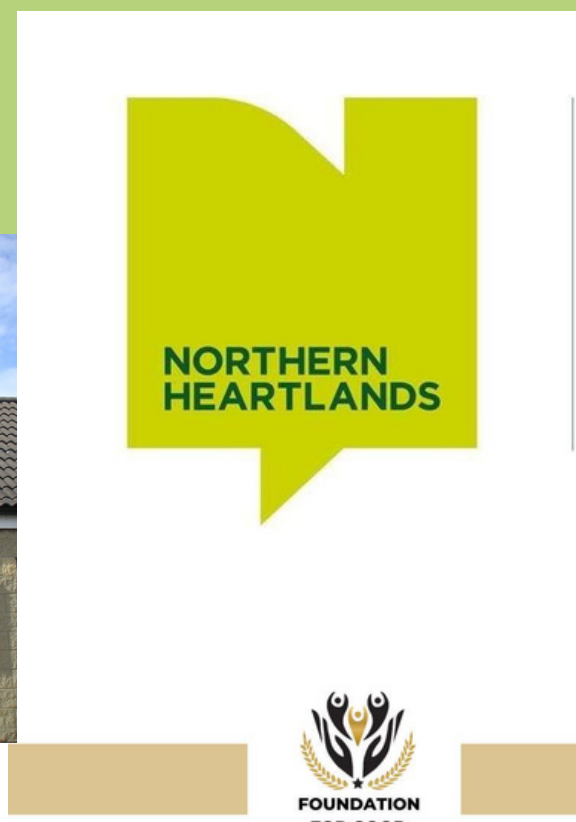
Workshop led by Sarah Banks, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University

This workshop explored ways VCSE organisations and their members are and can be involved in research on topics that matter to them – from local bus services to young people’s mental health or the climate crisis.

- What is a researchable topic, and how to choose relevant research questions?
- When should members of a community organisation do research themselves, what training and support is needed?
- Assessing whether to work in partnership with a larger voluntary organisation or university.
- How can community members feed into research agendas and commission research from others?
- How can communities use research to influence policy and practice?

## Who attended?

15 participants attended, there was a mix of community organisations, many of which are based or have projects in/relating to the 3 rural areas that the CRN is focussing on; Teesdale, Weardale and Derwent Valley. There was also representation from Public Health who could provide a useful perspective on how community research is valued by stakeholders.



**Research – a systematic study of information and experience that seeks to provide new knowledge about a topic or question.**

**Why does/should VCSE get involved in research?**

**How can VCSE get involved in research?**

Participants were asked for their thoughts...

- Capturing local voices in research context
- Evaluation
- Making a case, proving
- Articulate, quantify, evidence
- Credible, “proper researchers”
- Collective evidence base
- Develop provision, funding
- Raise profile nationally
- Our responsibility
- Community researcher e.g. young people

## A good research topic should be....**FINER**

**F**easible – is evidence available?

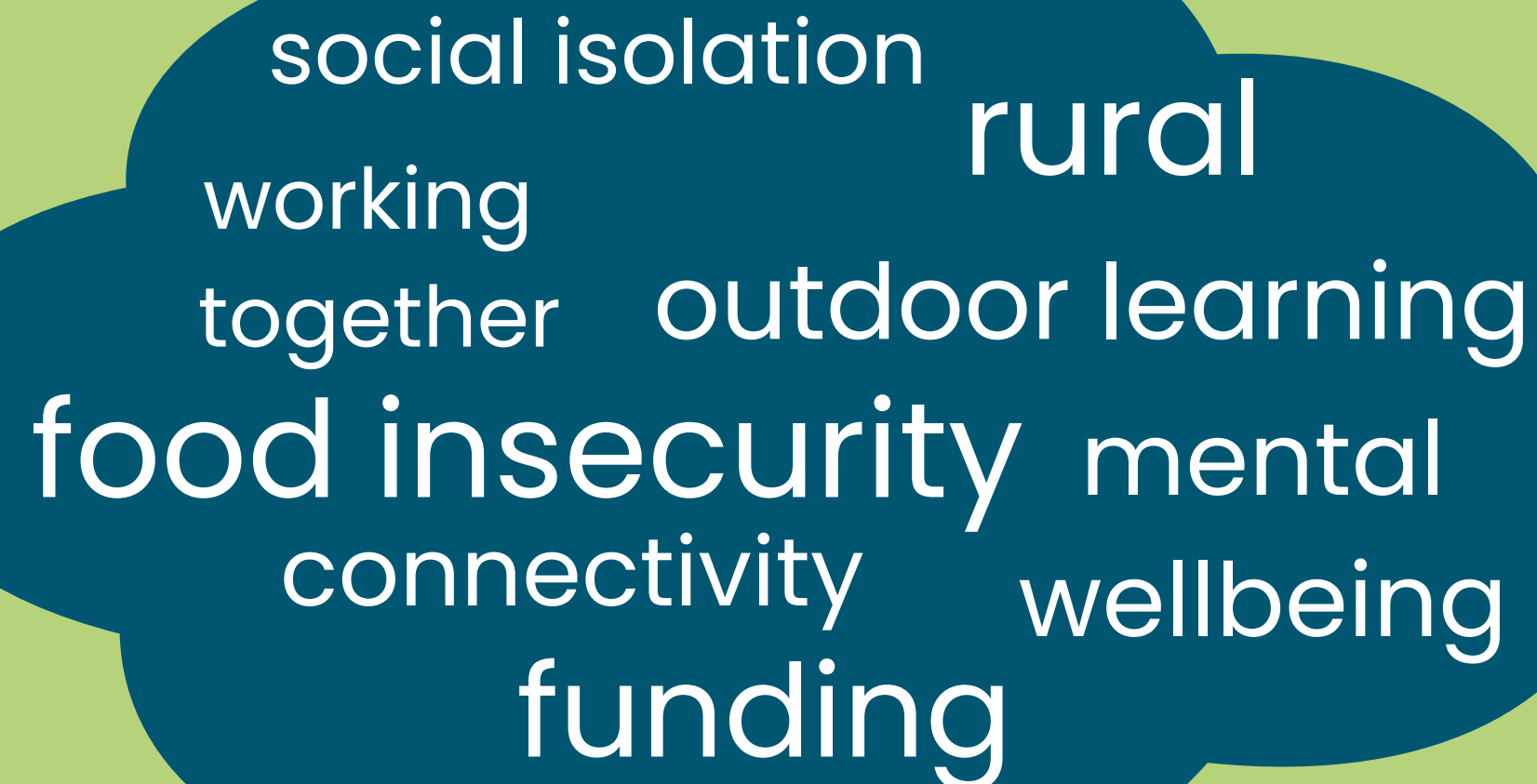
**I**nteresting – is it a motivating and important topic for you/your colleagues?

**N**ovel – has anyone else studied this before? Do you have a new angle?

**E**thical – will you cause any harm or infringe anyone's rights by doing this study?

**R**elevant – does it fit your organisation's purpose, values and current priorities?

Participants were asked "What is something you would like to change/improve in your community of place?" Topics groups felt were important...



social isolation  
working together  
rural outdoor learning  
food insecurity  
connectivity  
funding  
mental wellbeing



# Formulating a researchable question

County Durham rural CRN embraces three broad topics that are important to the county. These are:

The future of young people

Health and wellbeing outcomes particularly in relation to post-covid social recovery

Future-proofing services and systems, and maintaining service accessibility

- 1. What do you want to find out about your topic (specific research questions)?**
- 2. Who might be involved as researchers, advisors, funders (stakeholders)?**
- 3. How might the research be done (methods)?**
- 4. Might there be issues about confidentiality, potential harm to participants (ethics)?**
- 5. How might the findings be shared (dissemination)?**
- 6. How might you influence change-makers (impact)?**

**The 3 groups used their learning to design researchable questions around young people, future proofing services and health & wellbeing.**

**Their questions were as follows;**

**Future proofing services** – *What evidence is there that “rural weighting” for funding is required?*

**Young people** – *Could connecting with nature improve the mental health of school children post covid?*

**Health and wellbeing** – *How could community groups work together to reach the socially isolated? How do we understand their actual needs?*

## Participants thoughts for...

### Further training ideas?

- How to construct a questionnaire/interview
- How to conduct research effectively
- Presenting research – funders/change-makers/influencers
- Understanding own biases/assumptions
- Where to find others research – use and understand
- Ways to collaborate
- Creative methodologies
- Ethical considerations

### Future events?

- Networking for grassroots organisations
- Social gathering, information & skill share
- Capturing and encouraging youth voice and involvement in social action
- Connecting to support research i.e. universities

Really good to think about "today's issues" with a diverse group of people - new opportunities, different perspectives, fresh ideas.

Feeling overwhelmed, desire to do research & value what it could bring but question how?

A very lively session - great to network with like minded folk working directly with communities & understanding the issues. Heightened my sense of frustration that there is so much knowledge but it doesn't go anywhere or get heard

Feel that what we already do has more value than we realise  
Feel enthused to learn more

Really enjoyed hearing what other organisations are doing. Helpful networking. Good springboard for my own research. Thank You!

Really interesting and informative event Thank You!

A great session, I really enjoyed meeting new people and getting some new ideas

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Was unsure what to expect. Enjoyed listening to Sarah. Fiona helped to create a relaxed session. Enjoyed discussing current/local with like minded people.

# Feedback

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## Resources

*Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC) – community research toolkit, <https://arvac.org.uk/resources/>*

*Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University – toolkits, including ethics guidance and participatory research guide, <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/social-justice-community-action/toolkits/>*

*Centric Community Research – community research in Lambeth and Southwark with focus on ethnic and underserved communities, <https://centric.org.uk/>*

*Greater Manchester Third Sector Research Network (part of GMCVO) – research guide, [www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/good-evidence-guide-help-community-organisations-produce-research-gets-taken-seriously](http://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/good-evidence-guide-help-community-organisations-produce-research-gets-taken-seriously)*