

LPIP Community-Led Research Project

Voices of Newtown

Executive Summary

The Voices of Newtown project set out to strengthen community-led research and improve collaboration across Newtown by equipping local organisations with creative research methods. Rather than selecting a single research theme, the Project Team identified a stronger need: to develop community capacity so groups could explore the issues most relevant to them. A training event, Research Re-focused: Creative Research Methods for Community Impact, was therefore delivered to provide practical tools for reaching underrepresented voices and supporting more effective collaboration.

Held on the 13th of October at Hope Church, the event brought together representatives from community groups, charities, education and voluntary sectors. Participants chose from four workshops- Community Mapping, PhotoVoice (Photography), Collage/Textiles, and LEGO® Serious Play, each offering hands-on experience of alternative research methods designed to promote deeper insight, creativity and participant comfort. The event also incorporated structured and informal activities exploring communication preferences, collaboration challenges and local experiences.

Feedback was gathered through a printed post-event evaluation form and interactive activities. The findings highlight several clear themes. Participants valued the creative methods, particularly Community Mapping, which was consistently identified as the most useful tool for understanding both communities and organisational dynamics. Most attendees reported limited prior experience with these methods but agreed they could generate richer, more inclusive insights.

The research also revealed ongoing challenges within Newtown. Many attendees expressed frustration with “consultation fatigue” and identified difficulties in engaging young people. Several important groups, especially health services, local authorities, schools, businesses and young people were seen as absent from both the event and wider collaborative processes. Despite this, participants recognised strong assets within the town, including a highly active voluntary sector and a skilled base of facilitators.

Overall, the project increased local awareness and capability in creative research approaches within some groups and contributed towards strengthening collaborative relationships. In the post event review, members of the Voices of Newtown Project Team identified strong interest in the creative research methods introduced at the training event, noting that additional groups, both attendees and those who missed the event, would benefit from further support. They agreed that a follow-up session focused on targeted training would help build confidence, broaden adoption of these methods, and strengthen efforts to amplify underrepresented voices across the town.

Introduction

Project Background and Rationale

The Newtown project team is made up of individuals from the community who have experience on Town and County Councils, local charity and grass roots organisations, who primarily heard about this project via PAVO Locality Network meeting and invitations to join by those initial members. Following some initial discussions, the team decided to name the project ‘The Voices of Newtown’.

Initially when the team were brought together the focus of the project centred on a research project, with much discussion around the focus theme of the research. After exploring several options, the Voices of Newtown Project Team identified a stronger need in the town, the need to develop capacity within the community to allow organisations to gather their own research, using creative tools that may be better suited to those voices

within the town that are difficult to reach or those groups who don't wish to share their views, referred to as underrepresented voices. The group decided that hosting an event in the Newtown area that provided training on alternative creative research methods, and the principles of effective collaboration would be of value in the town.

This approach was chosen following a series of discussions that highlighted the following key points:

- The team felt that there are people who do not get to share their views during consultations and surveys about what people care about in Newtown and they wanted to find a way to help those people feel more able to take part, these people were often referred to as the 'underrepresented voices' within the town, and much of the initial discussion centred on how these voices could be represented and included.
- It was acknowledged that several relevant research projects had already been conducted in the past, and the team wished to avoid duplicating existing work.
- The group was unable to agree on a single overarching research theme, as a variety of interesting ideas had been proposed.
- It was recognised that while there were examples of strong collaboration within the community, recent experiences also revealed opportunities for improvement. Training in collaborative practice was therefore seen as a valuable area for development.

On this basis, the team concluded that hosting a training event for local groups, organisations, and charities would be the most effective way forward. The event would equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools to carry out their own research on topics most relevant to them. Emphasising creative research methods would introduce new approaches that could help amplify underrepresented voices, while training on collaboration would strengthen partnerships and improve collective working across the town. It was felt that this was an important aspect because funding grants are increasingly looking for evidence of collaborative working and reaching a broader range of people during public engagement, and creative methods would address this need.

Following the training event, the team decided to conduct research to gather attendees' views on the training they had received. Feedback was collected through a printed evaluation form distributed at the end of the event. The aim was to assess the value participants gained from the session, evaluate the overall success of the event, and inform potential next steps for the Voices of Newtown project, to facilitate a broader range of people having agency to impact what happens in the town.

Project Overview

Objectives

The project had the following core objectives.

- Provide training on creative research methods to allow attendees to conduct their own research programmes
- Provide a written toolkit and practical experience for participants to cascade the learnings to their colleagues, ensuring there is a cohort of representatives across Newtown who have had the training and can support each other to try out these new ideas and keep learning together about the best ways to put them into action locally.
- Explore the skills needed for improved collaboration
- Gain insight into the value participants gained from the session

Target Audience

The primary target audience for the training event was groups, organisations, charities and businesses in the Newtown area.

Methods

Training Event- 'Research Re-focused: Creative Research Methods for Community Impact'

The Training Event was held on Monday 13th October 9am – 3:30pm at Hope Church, Newtown.

Venue

The venue was suggested by the planning team on the basis that it was a modern facility, centrally located within the town, easily accessible by road, walking, rail and bus routes, with plentiful parking. The venue had the necessary provisions for access for those with disabilities and provided space for those who may need a quiet area during the day. There were several spaces within the building which was ideal for the format of the day which included several smaller workshops.

Date

The date selection was made based on it providing sufficient time to organise the day and avoided other events and key holiday windows. The Project Team provided insight that Monday would be the preferred day in which to hold an event of this nature.

Format and Schedule

The format of the day included an opportunity for networking on arrival, followed by a group session with Dr Jesse Heley and Dr Amy Sanders. The purpose of these sessions was to outline the theme of the day, provide some context, understand what participants wanted to gain out of the day and build relationships amongst the group of attendees. Following this, attendees could select two of four hosted workshops on the following creative research methods.

- Collage, textiles and arts based approach
- PhotoVoice (Photography)
- Community Mapping
- LEGO® Serious Play

Each workshop was designed by academics experienced in using these methods in their own research and were designed to be learning by doing and discussing, ensuring that participants could experience what it was like first hand to use each method.

Following the two workshop sessions, the group regathered in one space for a final group session with Dr Jesse Heley to provide a round up on the day.

Over the course of the event, it was important that we gave participants ample opportunity for comfort breaks and refreshments, along with access to outdoor spaces and private quiet areas should they need to make phone calls, check emails or reflect.

The full agenda can be found in appendix 1, along with the slides from each group session in appendix 2. An event overview can be found in appendix 14.

Event Registration

Eventbrite was used as a means of allowing people to register to attend the event. Eventbrite forms were created in both English and Welsh and used as the main call to action to invite people to register to attend the event.

As part of the Eventbrite form, several 'Frequently Asked Questions' were included to try to address some of the possible questions people may have and to reduce any potential anxiety about attendance, ensuring different needs were considered. These included questions relating to

- Public transport provisions
- Disabled parking facilities
- Bike parking
- Provisions for hearing and sight support dogs
- Availability of hearing loops
- Availability of quiet and outdoor space
- Attendance of notetakers and support persons to the event
- Funding of the event

Individuals were asked to indicate which workshops they would like to attend on the day which helped us gauge the numbers for each session. However, attendees were able to change their selected workshop choice on the morning of the training workshop.

Screenshots of the Eventbrite form can be found in appendix 3. On arrival attendees were asked to sign in to the event, the sign in sheet can be found on page 13.

Event Promotion

The following communication tools were used to promote the event.

- Social media- Voices of Newtown Facebook page created
- Paid for Facebook campaign targeting local groups, individuals and organisations
- Printed flyers and poster distributed to local groups
- Personalised e-mails
- Eventbrite adverts
- Local Notice Boards
- Project Team Networking

Sample promotional materials can be found in appendix 4 along with a communications plan in appendix 6 and examples of the branding in appendix 12.

Special Provisions

We asked attendees in advance of the event through the Eventbrite form if they required any special provisions or measures for the event. This included the following.

- Hearing support
- Provisions for guide dogs
- Translation services
- Dietary requirements

Although there were no requests for translation services in advance of the event, we made the decision to hire translation services to be made available during the day for anyone who booked last minute and wished to hear any information through the Welsh language or ask a question in Welsh.

We ensured that quiet spaces were made available during the day for those who needed to attend online meetings, make phone calls or have time for reflection. These spaces were utilised during the event day by two individuals who needed to take work related calls.

Post Event Evaluation Form

Following the training event, to gather attendees' views on the training they had received we asked all attendees to complete a short, printed evaluation form. The aim was to assess the value participants gained from the session, evaluate the overall success of the event, and inform potential next steps. It was felt that digital form sent via a link after the event would have had a lower number of responses. A copy of the evaluation form can be found in appendix 6.

Certificate of Attendance

All attendees were given the opportunity to receive a certificate of attendance. A copy can be found in appendix 11.

Activities

During the training event several activities were held to gather the thoughts and opinions from attendees.

- 'What's top and what's pants' - this activity asked people to write down on some printed 'tops' and 'pants' what was good (tops) and bad (pants) about collaboration in Newtown. This activity was set up in the lunch/ coffee break area of the event which allowed people to take part during their own time. The tops and pants were provided on Laura Ashley wallpaper which was a nod to the heritage of Newtown. This method is a fun, public and visual way to get people to share thoughts on a topic in an anonymously so that others can also read the contributions and reflect on them. Copies of the contributions received in this activity can be found in appendix 7 and will be discussed in the 'Findings' section of this report.
- 'Making it work' - this activity was run by Dr Amy Sanders and asked people what they felt was important to make the session work well. Activities like this were chosen so that participants could experience them but also consider replicating them for their own events and research. Full guidance on how to replicate these activities was made available in the post-event pack. The results can be found in appendix 8.
- Extra Team Member- in this activity, Dr Amy Sanders asked groups to draw and detail what an extra member of their team might look like, including their name, age, interests and concerns. The results can be found in appendix 9.
- Preferred Ways of Communicating Activity- this activity by Dr Amy Sanders allowed attendees to detail their preferences in relation to communication. The results can be found in appendix 15.
- Which petal are you? Activity- this activity by Dr Amy Sanders asked attendees to add their name to the petal which reflected the area of work/ sector that best represented them. This served as a visual reflection of who was present on the day. The visual can be found in appendix 16.

The findings of these activities will be discussed later in this report.

Workshops

Four workshops were offered at the event, with every attendee having the opportunity to attend two of their choosing. A full description of each workshop can be found below. The purpose of each session was for the academic or session leader to provide the participants with a taster of the creative methods, to provide them with the knowledge and skills to undertake the method for their own organisation. Each session was one hour in length and took place in a separate space.

- Collage, textiles and arts based approached
 - Using collage, textiles and arts-based approaches to collect personal stories. The items and processes help people to talk about a prompt or question as they do craft work. It can also help people work together.
- PhotoVoice (Photography)

- People use photography to capture images that represent their thoughts and feelings in relation to a set question such as “What do you want to see less of in your high street?”. People then talk about why they have chosen those specific photos often in response to a prompt or question.
- Community Mapping
 - Community mapping is the use of lines and symbols and commentary to highlight and discuss spaces and places within the community. The participants put stickers on a paper map of Newtown to represent places in response to a question and the numbered stickers were accompanied by a corresponding numbered sticky note placed on the outside of the map, so each chosen place was given a written explanation. This helps with creating new designs and feedback for public spaces, in response to a prompt or question.
- LEGO® Serious Play
 - LEGO® Serious Play is a different way to have a conversation – with the community, in organisations or in teams. This session introduces the principles of LEGO® Serious Play, by building LEGO® models in response to a prompt or question and thinking about how to use this approach in different community settings.

Photography from each of the workshop sessions can be found in appendix 10.

Challenges

A key challenge to an event of this nature was ensuring that all those delivering the training event and interested in participating were available on the same day. To address this plenty of time is needed to be built into planning and coordination.

In addition to this public transport facilities to and from Newtown are limited resulting in it being challenging for some people to attend the whole event.

The promotion of the event was challenging as it was often difficult to reach the correct people within organisations and businesses, with emails often landing in ‘Junk’ as they were from a previously unknown source. The primary route used was social media and personalised emails to individuals suggested by the planning team. Following the event, some groups expressed an interest in the training and had wished they had attended but weren’t aware of the event. This highlights the challenge of creating sufficient awareness of one single event, indicating that a series of events, or follow up event could be beneficial to reach a wider audience and take advantage of individuals wishing to attend from hearing the positive experience from those who had previously attended.

Project Findings

‘What’s tops and what’s pants’ about collaboration in Newtown? Activity Findings

The responses can be found in appendix 7. Some particularly notable points that correspond with the feedback from other activities are detailed below.

- ‘Too many consultations in the past when nobody is listening so what’s the point!’ – there was a strong sense from the discussion that there had been too much consultation in the town.
- ‘Reaching a wide demographic (especially young people)’ - throughout the project a key theme has been the difficulty in reaching young people.
- ‘Local authority and health not collaborating effecting third sector’ - this corresponds with the responses to the evaluation question relating to who was missing at the event, many responses indicated these same sectors.

As mentioned, this activity was placed in the event’s lunch and coffee area so attendees could participate during their free time. After the morning session, we noticed that no one had taken part, so we encouraged

attendees to engage with it during lunch. While some did, the number of responses shows that not everyone participated.

Key Takeaway: in future, it may be beneficial to allocate a specific time slot for this kind of activity to ensure full involvement.

‘Making it work’ Activity Findings

Some notable points that correspond with feedback from other activities are listed below.

- ‘Not about consultation, consultation to death’ - there was a strong feeling by one participant that there had been too much consultation in the town.
- ‘Methods that are useful for working with young people’ - once again, the theme of reaching young people was raised.

Extra Team Member Findings

Some notable points from this activity are detailed below.

- 5 team members were imagined. Interestingly, all 5 were under the age of 25. This corresponds to the desire to hear the voices of the younger generation of the town, and that younger people were missing from key discussions such as this training event.
- There were references to these individuals being worried, nervous, uncertain about sharing views.
- It was noted that creative aspects allow people to speak in a way that’s comfortable.

Preferred Ways of Communicating Activity

- Attendees expressed their preference to communicating in small group activities.
- The majority preferred visual communications.
- Most attendees were experienced in running group work.

Which petal are you? Activity

- This visual representation demonstrated that there was representation from a range of different sectors, with the majority being community or voluntary sector followed by education. It highlighted that there was no representation from the health sector, which was a notable point raised in other activities as detailed in this report.

Postcard Pledges

- At the end of the event, we distributed postcard to attendees with space for them to write a pledge for what would implement following the training. These pledge cards could then be posted directly to the individuals (stamps were provided), to serve as a reminder of the training and an encouragement to implement some of the learnings.

Evaluation Form Findings

As detailed earlier in the report, immediately following the event an evaluation form was distributed to gather attendees’ views on the training they had received. A summary of the findings can be found below,. 14 responses were received to the evaluation form, 17 people attended the training event (excluding academics,

trainers and co-ordinators), indicating a very good response rate. All the questions were optional so that is why there are different numbers of responses for each question and some were not answered at all.

- In the region of half of the responses indicated they had used these techniques before, with the other half not having used them.
- When asked in a tick box selection format which approach would be most appropriate for their organisations, the majority indicated Community Mapping, followed by PhotoVoice (Photography), then Collage and then LEGO® Serious Play.
- When asked from a scale of 1 'Strongly disagree' to 4 'strongly agree' if these approaches could deliver new/alternative/more developed insights into local experiences, needs and aspirations, the majority of respondents indicated 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree'
- When asked to select from the four data gathering techniques which might be of valuable for evaluating experiences and aspirations of your communities and clients/users, the majority of people indicated Community Mapping.
- When asked to select from the data gathering techniques which might be of value for evaluating experiences and aspirations of your co-workers, the majority of respondents indicated Community Mapping.
- When asked what aspects have been most useful, with the choice being 'Dealing with conflict, Ethics and Data Handling and Analysis' the majority indicated data handling and analysis.
- When asked in a 'Yes', 'No', 'Not Sure' format, do the organisations/ stakeholders represented in the workshop often work together the majority of respondents answered 'Yes'
- When asked which organisations/ groups were missing, respondents could provide their views in a free text format, the following were highlighted
 - Library
 - Schools
 - Government
 - Businesses
 - Welsh Community Members
 - More People in Power
 - No Answer
 - People Supported by Community Groups
 - Service Users Invited to Contribute
 - Health
 - Public Members
 - Young People
 - Youth Club Services
 - Local Churches
 - Sports Clubs
 - Health Board
 - Despite some of these groups being listed, during the analysis of the data it was highlighted that the individuals in attendance represent multiple organisations and therefore in face some of these areas were represented on the day, for example health and wellbeing.
- When asked the following question in relation to both Session 1 and Session 2 'Please share any new perspectives on the theme that might have emerged as a result of using a new method' in a free text format, the following themes emerged.
 - Allow richer data collection and dissemination
 - Layering and data analysis (mapping) and reflection
 - Mapping- post its for-people's opinions
 - Community mapping, layered wrapping outcomes
 - That the level of safety/ welcome attracted to a place depends on the perspective of the group or individual asked
 - The importance of engaging the younger generation
 - Restating of importance to engage in more constructive/ creative ways
 - Love to explore LEGO® Serious Play

- Young people! Photovoice AI consent, safeguarding and care
- Larger scale using these techniques on a large scale with other groups to be included
- LEGO® Serious Play, supporting shy/ anxious people on having a voice
- Not a new perspective but have important it is to engage with as broad a cross section of our community as possible
- How creativity can spark rich conversations
- When asked in a free text format ‘Has your perception of the challenges facing Newtown changed in the course of the day?’, participants answered as follows;
 - Not sure yet
 - Not especially, but great to consider different methodologies to employ
 - Not really
 - Not really
 - Reinforced what I already know
 - Brings home the difficulties
- When asked in a free text format ‘Has your perception of the opportunities for Newtown changed in the course of the day?’, participants answered as follows.
 - Nice to feel how rich our Newtown community sector is
 - Not especially but I did formulate a new youth research project as a result of the two workshops- was very focussed.
 - Yes, with the gaps and identifying the support needed for the town and the people
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - Really high proportion of the group who are skilled at facilitating- so there is a great potential for impact of this day.
 - A little, a constructive process that is outside of local authority will help though

Summary of Evaluation Form Key Themes

- **Limited prior experience with the methods-** there was a mixture in the level of experience people had with creative research methods. Some people had used some of the methods previously, in particular community mapping.
- **Strong preference for community mapping-** across multiple questions, Community Mapping was consistently identified as the most appropriate and valuable method for organisations, for understanding communities, and for evaluating co-worker experiences. PhotoVoice (Photography) was the next most preferred, followed by Collage and LEGO® Serious Play.
- **Perceived value of the approaches-** the majority agreed or strongly agreed that the approaches can generate new, alternative, or deeper insights into local experiences, needs, and aspirations.
- **Existing collaboration among organisations-** 11 respondents indicated their organisations already work together. One person indicated that they did not, another provided no answer and the final answer indicated ‘Not Sure’.
- **Notable gaps in representation-** a wide range of groups were perceived as missing from the workshop, including- libraries, schools, businesses, government, health services, young people, community members, service users, churches, sports clubs, and local organisations. It’s worth noting that the objective of the training day was not to attract young people necessarily, but instead to provide training to individuals who often work with these groups on creative ways of gathering their views to enable them to cascade this information. In relation to other groups missing from the day, having reviewed the attendees present, due to the nature of their roles and the fact they often have multiple roles and representations within the town, many of the sectors identified as ‘missing’ were in fact present in some form, but not perceived to be by some individuals. The ‘Which petal are you’ activity aimed to demonstrate the representation of different sectors on the day, which on reflection demonstrated that the only sector not in attendance was health.
- **Emerging perspectives from using new methods**
 - The methods allow richer, more layered data collection and analysis. Creativity leads to deeper conversations and insights.

- Importance of engaging younger generations.
- A sense that skilled facilitators and collaborative processes could drive positive impact.
- Recognition of a rich local community sector.

Summary of Key Themes

1. Over-consultation and Consultation Fatigue

Across multiple activities, participants expressed frustration with repeated consultations that do not lead to visible action.

2. Difficulty Engaging Young People

A major recurring theme was the lack of youth involvement. Young people were seen as missing from discussions, hard to reach, and often anxious or unsure about sharing their views. Participants emphasised the need for methods that help younger voices feel comfortable and confident.

3. Gaps in Cross-sector Representation

Several important groups- particularly health services, schools, young people, businesses, and community members were noted as absent. This aligns with broader concerns about weak collaboration with these sectors (especially health and local authority).

4. Strong Value Placed on Creative Methods

Participants responded positively to creative engagement tools. Community Mapping emerged as the most useful method across multiple contexts, this could be as a result of it being a more familiar method as a result of some people having some prior experience of it. This demonstrates how it may take time to build confidence with methods to understand their value. Community mapping could also be viewed as a method that is useful to gather information directly about a place, vs the more abstract creative approaches that need more additional supportive facilitation.

PhotoVoice (Photography), collage, and LEGO® Serious Play were also seen as beneficial for richer data collection, better dialogue, and supporting quieter or anxious participants.

5. Need for Structured Opportunities to Collaborate

Some activities had limited participation due to time pressures. This indicates that collaboration and engagement exercises need intentionally allocated time to ensure full involvement.

6. Importance of Safe, Small-group and Visual Communication

Attendees preferred small-group activities and visual ways of working. Many already had experiences facilitating group work, highlighting a strong local skill base.

7. Recognition of Local Strengths

Despite challenges, participants acknowledged:

- A rich and active community/voluntary sector
- Skilled facilitators within the town
- Potential for meaningful impact if collaboration becomes more constructive and inclusive

Next Steps

Following the event members of the Voices of Newtown Project Team gathered to discuss the findings of the project.

The following key themes were highlighted.

- There had been a positive response to the creative research methods during the training event which suggested there was an appetite within these groups to put these methods into practice.
- Community Mapping was a popular activity amongst the group, followed by PhotoVoice.
- Following the event it had been raised by a number of individuals and groups that they would have been interested in attending the event however hadn't heard about it, indicating that there could be more people open to receiving training and cascading this information across the town.

During the group discussion, the following groups were identified who would benefit from further training in these methods.

1. Those who didn't attend the event, but since heard about it through word of mouth and believed it would be relevant to them.
2. Those who attended the event but would be interested in attending a follow-up event with the insight they have already gained.
3. Those who are interested in developing creative methods with experts in a way which is relevant to their specific organisation.

Representatives from the project planning group involved in the data analysis meeting felt that a further follow-up event would be beneficial, which could target all the three groups above. This follow-up event would serve as another opportunity to provide training on selected creative methods, giving participants the confidence to adopt the methods themselves, and cascade the knowledge to others. This would ensure that the adoption of these methods in the town is further strengthened, supporting the original objective of aiding organisations to hear the underrepresented voices.

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