

LEARNING TOGETHER

THE LAT COMMUNITY EXPLORERS PROJECT

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Contents

Executive summary	1
1. The Project	2
Leicester Ageing Together and the Community Explorers Project in context	2
Co-operative approaches	3
Adult learners	5
Alignment with LAT Mental Wellbeing Model	6
2. Publicity and recruitment	8
3. Explorations	11
Visual Impairment Project	11
WISCP Project	12
Pukaar Group – Trips Project	14
Pukaar Group – Arts and Craft Project	17
City Ring Project	18
Silverstrand Club	19
Rhymes	20
Health Project	21
Crowdsourced Accessibility Map	21
Belgrave Knitters	22
Other Projects	24
4. Strengths and opportunities	25
Inclusivity	25
Free choice and empowerment	25
Connexions made with other groups	26
Increased self-esteem, confidence	26
5. Challenges faced and lessons learned	27
6. Looking backwards: a festival of exploration	28
7. Looking forward: legacies	30
Dissemination	30
Four steps to sustainability	31
8. Conclusion: what have we learned about community research?	33
The power of social and co-operative pedagogies and ABCD	33
Sustainability framework	33
A need for flexibility	33
Time is needed	33
Co-operative approaches	34
Learning Together	35
Appendix I	36
Appendix II	40
Index	42

Abbreviations

We have avoided abbreviations where reasonable. On first usage, each term is explained, but for handy reference, they are repeated here.

AB	.....	Aging Better
ABCD	.....	Asset-Based Community Development
ASD	.....	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BAME	.....	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
CBS	.....	Community Benefit Society
CE	.....	Community Explorers
HEC	.....	Higher Education Co-operative
ICA	.....	International Co-operative Alliance
LASALS	.....	Leicester Adult Skills and Learning Service
LAT	.....	Leicester Ageing Together
LCC	.....	Leicester City Council
LVC	.....	Leicester Vaughan College
MWM	.....	Mental Wellbeing Model
WEA	.....	Workers' Educational Association
WISCP	.....	West Indian Senior Citizens Project

Executive summary

The Community Explorers project was commissioned from LVC (Leicester Vaughan College) by LAT (Leicester Ageing Together) to run in 2019. The specification is presented in appendix 1. A small team worked with a diverse range of individuals – from different backgrounds, with varying levels of formal educational qualifications – to provide research training with three key objectives:

1. to empower people to use research in order to solve problems in their lives;
2. to encourage them to find ways to continue in doing this after the end of the project;
3. to realise their potential to act as a resource in solving community problems.

LVC employed various co-operative pedagogies in order to empower individuals to achieve these aims. These are grounded in notions of education for, and as, social justice. We placed Explorers in control of what they researched and how they did it, providing individual support and training to enable this.

We embraced some very different ways of knowing, privileging the experiential, using creative and arts based enquiries, as well as a rich range of methods for sharing this. Moreover, several projects worked to make visible the culturally and historically contingent.

These come packaged as part of a co-operative approach to knowing and being. We mapped these against the LAT Mental Wellbeing Model (MWM) and believe it showed a comprehensive way of achieving these approaches. Open recruitment meant that anyone could take part, and we

worked hard to ensure the lowest possible thresholds for participation through drop-in sessions in public and community spaces.

Our co-operative approaches focused squarely on capacity building: from self-responsibility and sustainability. We had a four-step framework, encouraging individuals to consider how they could sustain what they did after the project finished.

- Firstly, the ethical approach required by co-operative values meant that we were very upfront with Explorers, tailoring projects to be completed within the timeframe, or for sufficient momentum to have been gathered to have a reasonable chance of their continuing afterwards drawing support from within local communities.
- Secondly, the skills gained by individuals are also embedded in the various communities.
- In turn, this led to community capacities for new and different activities beyond these initial projects.
- Finally, Explorers were pointed to different ways to influence policies and pursue political change.

Whilst this was a new kind of work for LVC, as adult educators we are confident and comfortable sharing our learning journey with the Explorers too, approaching with candour our educational experiences in this project, for example that we gained valuable insights into the different communities in Leicester. In a democratic fashion, we believe this shows the value of learning together.

1. The Project

In late 2018 Leicester Vaughan College (LVC), a Community Benefit Society (CBS) was approached by Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) to develop a small programme for a community research scheme over six months with the following three aims:

1. to empower people to use research in order to solve problems in their lives;
2. to encourage them to find ways to continue in doing this after the end of the project;
3. to realise their potential to act as a resource in solving community problems.

These objectives meant finding ways to give our Community Explorers (CEs) confidence and skills, resourcefulness and connections.

Leicester Ageing Together and the Community Explorers Project in context

Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) is one of a number of partnerships established across the country as part of 'Ageing Better', a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund. Ageing Better projects aim to combat social isolation by developing creative ways in which older people can be actively involved in their local communities.¹

Other UK towns and cities engaging in 'Ageing Better' (AB) programmes include Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, and Sheffield.² In Leicester, the programme has focused on five city wards: Belgrave,

Evington, Thurncourt, Spinney Hills and Wycliffe. These wards were selected because of the presence of a range of risk factors associated with social isolation as identified by older people.

Over the course of 5 years, the LAT programme has involved 17 delivery partners working in collaboration with the City Council, health partners, and older people themselves on 23 different projects.³

Across the UK, one of the many ways in which older people in 'Ageing Better' towns and cities have become more involved in their local communities has been through

1. Leicester Ageing Together, 'About Us' at <https://www.leicesterageingtogether.org.uk/about-us/> [accessed 10th February 2020].

2. Welcome to Ageing Better in Birmingham at <https://www.ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk/> [accessed 9th February 2020]; Bristol Ageing Better at <http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/> [accessed 9th February 2020]; Centre for Ageing Better, 'Our Work in Greater Manchester' <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/about-us/our-work-greater-manchester> [accessed 9th February 2020]; Age Better in Sheffield at <https://www.agebetterinbirmingham.co.uk/> [accessed 9th February 2020].

3. Leicester Ageing Together, 'About Us' at <https://www.leicesterageingtogether.org.uk/about-us/> [accessed 10th February 2020]
Centre for Ageing Better, Primary Research into Community Contributions in Later Life at <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/research-into-community-contributions> [accessed 10th February 2020]

participation in community research, not as the subjects of research, but as the researchers themselves. Examples include an examination of ‘community contributions in later life’ in Bristol, Scarborough, Settle and Leeds,⁴ and research on ‘age friendly communities’ in Manchester.⁵

Such ethnographic and participatory research, carried out by individuals embedded in their local communities, is valuable for research purposes because it can be ‘location specific and sensitive to local contexts’.⁶

Where it succeeds, it can be a valuable and rewarding experience for the researchers themselves and can bring benefits to their communities.⁷ In Leicester, we did not

embark on our project with a particular research agenda in mind, or any specific research questions that we wanted community researchers (known in Leicester as ‘Community Explorers’) to ask, we simply sought to offer older people in the city the opportunity to research the issues that mattered to them.

Some groups were approached specifically to achieve a representative demographic. With such a small sample and no possible statistical significance, we do not, however, consider this statistically. Rather, we offer proof of concept for an approach.

Co-operative approaches

LVC is a Higher Education Co-operative (HEC). The meaning of this is twofold. Firstly, LVC is legally constituted as a co-operative, and as a member of Co-ops UK applies the ethics and values of the

International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). This is an important frame of reference both for the project and our educational approach.

Co-operative Values	Co-operative Principles
Self-help Self-responsibility Democracy Equality Equity Solidarity	Voluntary and Open Membership Democratic Member Control Member Economic Participation Autonomy and Independence Education, Training, and Information Cooperation among Co-operatives Concern for Community

4. Centre for Ageing Better, ‘Primary Research into Community Contributions in Later Life’ at <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/research-into-community-contributions> [accessed 9th February 2010].

5. T. Buffle, ed. *Researching Age Friendly Communities: Stories from Older People as Co-Investigators* (Manchester, 2015).

6. Centre for Ageing Better, ‘Primary Research into Community Contributions in Later Life: Local Report for Ashley Ward Bristol’, October 2018, at <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Ashley-Ward-Primary-research-community-contributions.pdf> p. 10 [accessed 9th February 2010].

7. Bristol Ageing Better, ‘Bristol Ageing Better Learning Event: Community Researchers’, unpublished report May 2019, p.7.

Secondly, LVC uses co-operative pedagogies, centred on student-led learning, such as student as producer, mass intellectuality, emancipatory and disruptive pedagogies, representative curricula, and participatory action research.⁸ The exact combination in which these might be applied on a project such as this is flexible, but include:

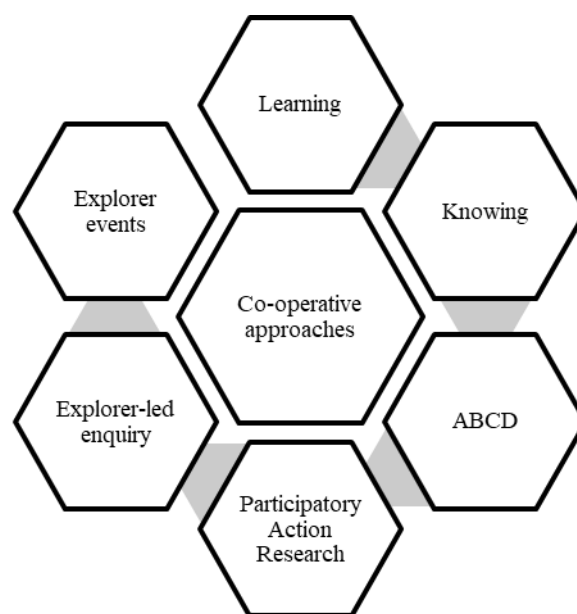
- participatory action research;
- Explorers identifying and executing their own projects;
- different ways of knowing, including arts-based inquiry, experiential learning;
- decolonizing histories.

Whilst the individual co-operative approaches might be found anywhere, in combination and concentration, they provide a powerful framework for community projects, engaging and subsequently empowering individuals.

Education sits at the heart of the co-operative movement. There is a structural commitment to it – the fifth principle. Yet this is hardly defined, and whilst historically this has been a very rich vein in the working-class adult education auto-didact tradition, in the last decades of the twentieth century became focused rather

narrowly on meeting the needs of the co-operative movement and training co-operators.⁹

Yet since around 2000, co-operative education has looked far beyond the immediate movement. In the last decade or so, there has been growth in the UK particularly of a schools movement offering alternatives to academies, and an active university project with a number of Higher Education Co-operatives clustered around the Co-operative College.¹⁰ The corollary of much of this work points to the suitability of co-operative learning for adults, and for the co-operative (higher) education



8. For discussion of mass intellectuality see Richard Hall and Joss Winn, 'Mass Intellectuality and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education' in Hall and Winn (eds), *Mass Intellectuality and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education* (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.1-16; on Student as Producer see Mike Neary, Gary Saunders, Andy Hagyard, and Dan Derricott, *Student as Producer: research-engaged teaching, an institutional strategy* (Higher Education Academy, 2014); on other aspects of co-operative pedagogies see discussion in Malcolm Noble and Cilla Ross 'Now Is the Time for Co-operative Higher Education', in Noble and Ross (eds), *Reclaiming the University for the Public Good: Experiments and Futures in Co-operative Higher Education* (Palgrave, 2019), pp.1-22.
9. See e.g. Lynda Baloché, 'A Brief View of Cooperative Learning from Across the Pond, Around the World and Over Time', *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 44, 3 (2011), pp.25-30. On the broader history, Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2e (Yale University Press, 2010).
10. A number of essays in Tom Woodin (ed.), *Co-operation, Learning and co-operative values: contemporary issues in education* (Routledge, 2015) deal with co-operative schools. Also see: Deborah Ralls, 'Reimagining Education Policy: Co-operative schools and the social solidarity alternative', in Tom Woodin and Linda Shaw (eds), *Learning for a Co-operative world: education, social change and the Co-operative College* (IOE UCL Press, 2019), pp.154-69. On the most recent developments in Co-operative Higher Education see: Noble and Ross (eds), *Reclaiming the University for the Public Good*. A more general overview, if somewhat dated, is found in Linda Shaw, 'Co-operative Education Review 2011' (Co-operative College, 2012).

movement to benefit from the contribution which might be made by this group.¹¹

Wilkins offers a contextual framework in which to understand co-operative learning.

These are not mutually exclusive categories and show the transformational potential of co-operative learning for adult learners. At its heart, the approach centres on what Nigel Rayment terms ‘democracy, equity and fairness’.¹²

We applied these in this project particularly around allowing Explorers to choose their own topics and explore them in ways of their own choosing.

Wilkins’s Framework of Co-operative Learning

Co-operative Learning as

- a learning philosophy
- a form of experiential learning
- effective group working
- learning in a co-operative group
- pedagogy
- a part of a social movement
- an expression of values and educational beliefs
- an agent of change
- social capital and self-actualization

Based on Alan Wilkins, ‘Co-operative Learning – a Contextual Framework’, *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 44, 3 (2011), pp.5-14.

Adult learners

The need for and value of adult education has been consistently identified in recent years by so many different government and NGO reports that it is impossible to cite them in a report of this length.¹³ The major change has been from a broader-based notion of adult education towards the neoliberal notion of lifelong learning, focusing narrowly on learning for labour market gains. Under this model, economic objectives largely supplant educational ones, and financial responsibility for participation falls to individuals.¹⁴

It is unsurprising, then, that those seeking to learn for all sorts of non-professional reasons have in effect been priced out of adult education, and that provision has decreased rapidly. Mainstream higher

education appears increasingly unwilling and unable to meet the needs of these learners previously met by broad-based extramural and outreach departments.

There are clear benefits to the quality of life of older people.¹⁵ Marion Bowl identified the paradoxical status of adult education as apparent priority under mortal threat: ‘Why, when lifelong learning has been a policy priority for the past 40 years, does publicly funded adult education appear to be fighting for its life?’¹⁶

In the Community Explorer project we sought to make available 1:1 and small group support to a broad range of adult learners around an agenda of democracy, empowerment, and confidence.

11. This is discussed at greater length in Malcolm Noble ‘Co-operative Higher Education is the Answer: how to save adult education for the last time’, *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 21, 1 (2019), pp.139-44.

12. Nigel Rayment, ‘Co-operative Learning – Values into Practice’, *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, 44, 3 (2011), pp.15-24.

13. The recent Centenary Commission on Adult Education report ‘*A Permanent national Necessity: adult education and lifelong learning for 21st century Britain*’ (University of Nottingham, 2019) is one of the most prominent.

14. Marion Bowl, *Adult education in neoliberal times: policies, philosophies and professionalism* (Palgrave, 2017), pp.24-5.

15. Pilar Escuder-Mollon, ‘Modelling the impact of lifelong learning on senior citizens’ quality of life’, *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 46 (2012), pp. 2339-2346

16. Marion Bowl, *Adult education in neoliberal times: policies, philosophies and professionalism* (Palgrave, 2017), p.3.

Alignment with LAT Mental Wellbeing Model

This approach aligned well with two approaches adopted by LAT. Firstly, it presented a very high-value offering for individuals, by working 1:1 and in some cases even 2:1 with Explorers to identify interests, research questions, training and support needs, as well as providing supervision and personal training. Asset-

Based Community Development (ABCD) was fundamental to our approach, by identifying the individual requirements of Explorers or the groups they represented.

Different projects aligned with different segments of the LAT Mental Wellbeing Model (MWM), as presented in the table below:

Segment	CE project in general	Individual explorations
A. Take care of your body:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do things that make you laugh 2. Be active 3. Take exercise 4. Get enough sleep 5. Eat well and drink sensibly 6. Get some fresh air 	Encouraging projects focused on wellbeing, moving around, and exercise, especially for individuals finding this harder A2, A3, A5, A6	<p>Wellbeing groups encouraged bodily care</p> <p>Healthy living and exercise</p> <p>Exploration of shopping centres, walking routes</p>
B. Take care of your mind:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk about your feelings 2. Take steps to handle stress 3. Be mindful/take notice 4. Self-acceptance 5. Develop resilience 6. Focus on optimism 7. Increase your sense of gratitude 8. Sense of wonder: take care of your spiritual self 	<p>Individual approaches created space for B1, B2, B3</p> <p>Reflective practice at different times pointed to B1, B3, B4</p> <p>Skills and confidence led to developing B4-8</p>	<p>Visual Impairment Project</p> <p>WISCP Project</p> <p>Belgrave Knitters</p>
C. Connect with yourself:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Who I am': reviewing your life 2. Self-appreciation 3. Self-compassion 4. Focusing on what you value and believe 5. Make meaning, join the dots 6. Develop goals for the next phase of your life 7. Self-belief: 'I can make things happen' 	Explorers identified and voiced 'what mattered' to them. They then addressed concerns/issues themselves. This process led to development in areas C1 – C7.	<p>Examples include projects which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigated and raised awareness of disability and accessibility issues; • looked at perceived values and benefits of attending day centres/ community groups; • looked at ways in which community groups might extend their range of activities.

Segment	CE project in general	Individual explorations
D. Connect with others		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain and build your relationships 2. Give to others 3. Be a part of something bigger 4. Make a contribution 5. 'We are part of the solution' 	<p>Process at heart of CE project facilitates connection with others</p> <p>ABCD approach particularly relevant here</p>	<p>Many meaningful connections made between individual Explorers and wider community. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sight loss project; • knitting project; • city ring project.
D. Keep Learning		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning projects: trying out new things - or digging deeper into past interests - on your own or informally with others: using a new gadget, trying a new recipe, watching a new-to-you TV programme, reading a new author, walking new routes 2. Learning in groups: IT, family history, cooking, armchair aerobics, arts and crafts, rights and entitlements etc. 3. Exercise your creativity 	<p>CE project deeply aligned to process of lifelong learning.</p> <p>CE project encouraged Explorers to express creativity</p> <p>CE project has been a 'starting point' for many Explorers who now have the skills, knowledge and confidence to continue their learning.</p>	<p>Individual explorations which will continue after end of CE project include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sight loss project; • city ring project; • Pukaar Group arts and craft project; • Silverstrand Club project; • healthy eating and wellbeing project.

2. Publicity and recruitment

A variety of approaches were employed in order to promote the CE project. We were guided and supported by LAT in recruitment and publicity with a view to ensuring an inclusive approach. We were keen that the city's different communities were represented insofar as possible, and enjoyed considerable success in this regard.

Publicity material, designed by LVC staff and approved by the LAT learning officer, was distributed to community groups

physically, and online via LVC and LAT websites and social media. Posters and flyers were designed to communicate the aims and objectives of the project in a gentle, encouraging and inclusive manner. Text was kept to a minimum and care was taken with terminology used to make it as plain-speaking and clear as possible. We initially avoided the use of the term 'research' as advised by LAT; for some this certainly made becoming an Explorer a less-intimidating prospect; for others, however, this was somewhat obfuscating.



Fig 3a: Initial Publicity Material for LAT Community Explorers Project

The most successful approach to recruitment, however, proved to be by face-to-face contact with groups and individuals. LVC staff attended volunteer fairs such as those at Evington House and the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre where they spoke to visitors and exhibitors about the project. They also attended events such as the WEA (Workers Educational Association) 'Mighty Minds' Festival and the LAT Learning Event at the Highfields Community Centre. Meaningful connections were also made by visiting a number of community groups and organisations.

These included:

- PYCA (Pakistani Youth and Community Association)
- WISCP (West Indian Senior Citizens Project)
- Highfields Centre
- Silverstrand (Highfields)
- Wellbeing Group (Belgrave)
- Pukaar Group (Belgrave)
- African Caribbean Centre
- Vista Forum
- Tea and Toast Group (Belgrave)
- Anything Goes Group (Belgrave)
- Luncheon Group (Belgrave)
- Belgrave Knitters
- Thurncourt Pop In Cafe
- Breakfast Club (Thurncourt)
- Seabrook Group (Thurncourt)

In all interactions with community groups and individuals, the broad approach in how the project was structured was to give training in research methods and dissemination of findings but to be as inclusive as possible. The questions which followed approaches were: what matters to you? how can we help you explore it? and how can this fit to the project? The concept that Explorers should feel free to research the 'issues that mattered to them' was paramount in the approach taken.

A series of informal drop-in sessions was organised for the months of June and July 2019, mainly because they offered such a low threshold for participation. These sessions were an opportunity for Explorers and potential Explorers to meet and chat to each other about their research interests over a cup of tea.

Why not become a Community Explorer?

LAT Community Explorers is a Leicester Ageing Together Project. If you are 50 + and would like to explore and take action on the issues that matter to you, then please do get in touch.

For more information join us at one of our drop in sessions every Monday in June and July

Mornings 11am-12 noon Old Library café, Leicester Adult Education College, Belvoir Street, Leicester, LE1 6QL.	Afternoons 2pm -3pm Hobby Room, Wolsey Building, Ross Walk, Leicester, LE4 5AW.
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Or contact Ann Stones: email: [redacted]
tel: [redacted]

Logos: Leicester Ageing Together, COMMUNITY FUND, LEICESTER City of Vaughan College

Fig 3b: Publicity material for drop in sessions

These sessions provided an opportunity for Explorers to develop their ideas and, if they decided to do so, to commence their research. Some attendees decided not to take this route but continued to attend the drop-in sessions, to participate in discussions and contribute to the work of those who did become Explorers.

Some of those who did not complete the formal application process to become an Explorer expressed the view that they were ‘put off’ by the LAT/VISTA application forms, including the need for two referees. It is possible that more

Explorers could have been recruited to the project if there had been a more informal, less bureaucratic application process. On the other hand, this did secure buy-in.

Ten research projects eventually emerged from those that did decide to take the process forward. LVC staff worked with the Explorers concerned in order to formulate research plans, identify training needs and provide any training required. Short summaries of individual projects are in the next section.



Fig 3c: Attendees at one of the LAT Community Explorer ‘drop-in sessions’ pictured with LVC staff.

3. Explorations

The main Community Explorer projects are listed below; some projects which did not happen are noted at the end, of this

section. We have used initials in the report unless individual Explorers asked otherwise.

Visual Impairment Project

Urmila became a Community Explorer after a hearing about the LAT Community Explorers Project at an LVC Open Research Forum. Urmila had already completed a LAT social pedagogy course. Urmila has visual impairment and was interested in raising awareness, particularly amongst Leicester's BAME communities, of:

- common causes of sight loss;
- social and emotional issues associated with sight loss;
- practical issues (around the home and out of the home) associated with sight loss;
- help available for those with sight loss particularly through organisations such as VISTA and RNIB.

As she joined the CE project, Urmila was preparing for a production at the Leicester Curve Theatre based on the theme of 'home' as a place of safety but also as a 'prison' for those with sight loss. In the production, these issues were explored through drama, poetry and song. However, Urmila was keen to increase awareness of issues associated with sight loss amongst an even wider audience.

Much of Urmila's initial research had been completed prior to joining the project, but

during the course of the project she was supported to present her work in new ways (such as power point presentations) to new audiences. Urmila has presented her work to a number of local community groups, speaking both in English and Gujarati. She incorporates her research, her personal experience, and her poetry into her presentations.



Fig 4a: Urmila speaking at WEA Mighty Minds Festival, June 2019 [image reproduced with permission of Urmila]

During her presentations Urmila has explored sensitive issues such as the stigma associated with disability, including the belief by some that disability is a form of punishment for wrongs committed in this or a previous life. At the time of writing, her work has been presented to approximately 200 people. It has always been well received and has stimulated discussion and debate. At least two people who have listened to Urmila's talks have

expressed an interest in becoming VISTA volunteers. Urmila has presented her research to the general public at a festival of community research which marked the end of the CE project.

Urmila is passionate about her work and is committed to continuing it after the end of the CE project. She has the skills and confidence to do so and has formed meaningful relationships with a number of local community groups.

WISCP Project

The West Indian Senior Citizen's Project was established in 1983 to maintain and improve the quality of life of elderly African Caribbean people in Leicester and Leicestershire.¹⁷ It runs a day centre and a luncheon club. The day centre manager, LS, became an Explorer in order to explore what coming to the centre means to attendees. LS was recruited to the CE project after a visit to the centre by LVC staff.

Some of the attendees at the centre have limited capacity because of issues such as dementia. It was, therefore, necessary to address ethical issues associated with conducting research involving these individuals. The question of informed consent ruled out methodologies such as recorded interviews.

After taking advice from staff at LASALS who have conducted similar projects, it was decided that the best method to conduct

the research would be through the creation of a piece of artwork produced jointly by the whole group.¹⁸ The finished piece of artwork would be owned by WISCP and individual identities of participants would not be disclosed. No photographic images of participants would be included in any resulting outputs.

The CE project was able to fund the involvement of 'Crafting Relationships', a specialist agency, in order to create the group artwork.¹⁹ The work was created in two one-hour sessions, with a break for lunch, at the centre, on Friday, 4 October 2019. The day commenced with a group discussion on participants' feelings about attending the centre. Key themes which emerged from the discussion included laughter, friendship and food.

Work then commenced on artwork to express these themes. The work consisted of 3 separate canvases (50cm x 50 cm)

17. West Indian Senior Citizens Project at <https://www.leicesterageingtogether.org.uk/about-us/our-partners/west-indian-senior-citizens-project/> [accessed 5th October 2019]

18. Details of LASALS can be found here: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/adult-skills-and-learning/>

19. Crafting Relationships at <https://www.craftingrelationships.co.uk/> [accessed 5th October 2019]

which participants painted. (There were approximately 3 participants working on each canvas). In the morning the backgrounds were painted using dementia friendly colours known to have a calming effect (green and yellow).

After lunch various household objects were used to create prints on top of the background. These prints were made in red, a colour known to stimulate memory. After this, stencils were used to superimpose words which had been generated during the earlier discussions.

The creation of the artwork seemed to be an enjoyable activity for all participants. The inclusive methods employed ensured that all attendees could participate if they chose to.

The artwork will be mounted as a set of three on the wall at the centre as a mark of achievement and to generate further discussion amongst attendees and visitors to the centre. The work may also be used by the centre for recruitment and publicity purposes and when seeking funding. The work was displayed at the festival of community research which marked the end of the CE project. LS hopes to draw on this experience to conduct similar research projects in the future.

Images of the artwork are reproduced as figures 4b, 4c, and 4d.



Fig 4b: 'Laughter' Reproduced with permission of WISCP



Fig 4c: 'Friendship' Reproduced with permission of WISCP.



Fig 4d: 'Food' Reproduced with permission of WISCP

Pukaar Group – Trips Project

The Pukaar Group meet regularly once per week at the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre.

They are a well-established social group whose members have a range of disabilities. Several of them are wheelchair users. They were recruited to the CE project by LVC staff who visited the group at the suggestion of the LAT learning officer and LAT community connectors.

The group were keen to explore the possibilities of arranging day trips out to local venues, such as shopping centres. They had been trying to arrange such trips for some time without success. The main issue had been cost of transport. This was an issue that was obviously very important to them and so, in keeping with our aim of encouraging Explorers to 'seek answers to questions which matter to them', LVC staff worked with the group to design a research plan.



Fig 4e: Members of Pukaar Group on their trip to Fosse Park (reproduced with permission of Pukaar Group).

Firstly the needs of the group in relation to a day trip were established through group discussion.

- The group would need transport for 9 members, 1 carer, and 4 volunteer helpers. 6 of the members were wheelchair users.
- Places that the group would like to visit included: Fosse Park, Town, Garden Centres, Museums, Space Centre, Cinema, Great Central Railway, Canal Trips.
- The group would like to go 'short day trips' returning home by 3.30pm.
- It was decided by the group that a trip to Fosse Park would be their preferred

destination.

After this the group set to work on the following plan

- Contact transport providers and establish the costs involved.
- Investigate sources of funding.
- Investigate sources of volunteer helpers.
- Organise and undertake day trip for evaluation purposes

A separate accessibility survey to be undertaken on the trip was also designed. The areas covered by the survey included:

Aspect	Queries
Transport	To consider ease of booking, ramps or lifts, how many wheelchairs accommodated, wheelchair clamps/seatbelts, will driver assist with clamping? cost etc.
Retail outlets	To consider width of aisles, lifts, entrances, thresholds, are goods on display visible/reachable from wheelchairs?
Catering outlets	Consider entrances, space for wheelchairs at and between tables, how many wheelchair users can be accommodated at once.
Toilet facilities	To consider disabled toilet facilities, enough space, hand rails, lower level sinks, raised toilets, changing tables, if disabled toilets locked how easy is it to get key? etc.
Outside areas	To consider car parks, pavements, crossings, curbs, surfaces, gradients/cambers etc.
Miscellaneous	Any other accessibility issues identified by group.

Once this plan was in place, the group made rapid and independent progress in identifying a number of transport providers and in getting quotes. The cheapest option proved to be social service minibuses, however this option required the completion of a considerable amount of paperwork that the group were not keen to undertake (although this may be

something that LAT community connectors could help the group with in the future). Only slightly more expensive, and in some practical ways far simpler, was the use of private wheelchair taxis which would pick group members up from their own home and take them to an agreed rendezvous point at Fosse Park.

As the trip was to be a research exercise, as well as a day out, it was agreed that funding for the transport could come from the CE budget. However, as a result of their research, the group is now aware of other potential sources of funding.

After the recruitment of enough volunteers to push wheelchairs, risk assessment and clarification of insurance issues, the trip took place on 18 October 2019.

Many positive things emerged about the accessibility of the shopping centre for wheelchair users, they included:

- Helpful staff.
- Accessible entrances to stores.
- Ramps were in place where necessary – particularly in areas where building work was in progress.

However several accessibility issues were identified in the survey, they included:

- A need for more seating areas both in stores and in outside areas.
- A need for more space in disabled toilets.
- A need for more ‘in store’ staff in many retail outlets to assist electric wheelchair or mobility scooter users who are shopping without carers but who need help in reaching down goods that they might wish to purchase.
- A need for a ‘changing places’ toilet in the centre.²⁰

Outputs:

- Now that the trip has been completed it is hoped that the group might generate

a fact sheet or similar about practicalities of organising day trips that other community groups, particularly those with disabilities, could use. The fact sheet could be available online via websites such as LAT, Vista, Age UK, and Local Council. Also hard copies could be available at neighbourhood centres etc. (NB since formulation of the research plan LVC staff have been made aware that LAT are involved in a similar initiative, it is hoped that the Pukaar Group might be able to contribute to this initiative).

- The information gathered in the accessibility survey will be shared with other disabled groups, and a copy of the accessibility survey has been forwarded to the management of Fosse Park.
- Members of the Pukaar Group have shared their work and findings with other Explorers and the wider public at the festival of community research which marked the end of the CE Project.

The group have worked very hard, for the most part independently, on this project, making their own phone calls and dealing with outside agencies. In an evaluation exercise carried out by LVC staff at the festival of community research, members of the group expressed the view that they had gained or regained confidence as a result of the project.

It is hoped that this has been an empowering experience and that the skills and confidence gained during the project will be of use to them and their wider communities in the future.

20. ‘Interactive Changing Places Guide’ online at <https://cpguide.interfixgroup.com/>. See Appendix II for more details of accessibility survey carried out by the Pukaar group.

Pukaar Group – Arts and Craft Project

As well as their desire to organise a day out, discussions with the Pukaar Group revealed that they were also keen to extend the range of activities that they undertake in their regular meetings at the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre.

They were keen that these activities should be art and crafts based. This was a long standing concern which the group were keen to explore and so LVC staff worked with them to design a research plan.

Research Objectives

- To organise further tuition and support for the group in arts and crafts.

Issues Identified by the Group

- The group wanted to learn new fabric crafts and sewing skills. They were

particularly interested in furthering their skills in the use of sewing machines.

- The group wanted to focus on techniques such as button-holes, setting zips, patchwork, appliqué and embroidery.
- The aim of group members was to create individual hand-crafted fabric items for personal and domestic use. (The group did not want to undertake a large communal project).
- Some group members self-identified their need for practical assistance with creative tasks.
- There was a need to source volunteers and specialist equipment to support group members in craft sessions.



Fig 4d: Banner created by Pukaar Group (reproduced by permission of Pukaar Group)

Research Plan

- To identify and contact potential tutors/supporters and volunteer helpers
- To investigate how this might be funded (consider cost of tutors, materials and equipment)
- To commence art/craft work and evaluate

Once this plan was in place the group rapidly and independently put the plan into action, and contacted a number of potential providers. As a result of this process the group have arranged for a WEA²¹ tutor to provide a 6 week course for the group, to take place at the neighbourhood centre. The course will consist of 6 two hour sessions commencing in January 2020.

The WEA will fund the cost of the tutor and organise volunteer helpers. The group will make a small contribution to costs of materials themselves. The course will focus on embroidery and patchwork.

Outputs

- Members of Pukaar Group shared their work with other Explorers and the

wider public at a festival of community research which marked the end of the CE Project.

- The group might generate a fact sheet or similar about practicalities of organising arts and crafts activities that other community groups, particularly those with disabilities, could use. Fact sheet could be available online via websites such as LAT, Vista, Age UK, and Local Council. Also hard copies might be available at neighbourhood centres, etc.

The Pukaar Group have worked with a great deal of passion and enthusiasm on this project.

A methodical research-based approach seems to have worked very well for them in addressing this particular issue. In an evaluation exercise carried out by LVC staff at the festival of community research, members of the group suggested that they had gained a great deal in terms of self-esteem and confidence as a result of their work. Again, it is hoped that they will be able to draw on this experience for the benefit of themselves and their communities in the future.

City Ring Project

David M became an Explorer after attending an LVC Open Research Forum. He has been involved in a long term personal research project designing a circular walking route around the city of Leicester, similar to the already existing 'Leicestershire Round' footpath around the county, but based on a circular route within the bounds of the city. David M has

already mapped certain sections of his proposed walking route, for example the section between Belgrave and Evington, but his aim is to map a full circular route around the city. The route will incorporate several places of historical interest.

David M's intended output is to produce paper and digital maps of his route which

21. WEA, Adult Learning Within Reach, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland at <https://www.wea.org.uk/east-midlands/leicester-leicestershire-and-rutland> [accessed 6th October 2019]

he hopes to distribute via the Ramblers Association and Leicester City Council.

David M's project has the potential for recreational, physical/mental wellbeing, heritage, and environmental benefits for local communities. His completed route could prove to be a civic asset.

Unfortunately, due to a large number of other commitments, David M has been unable to take his work much further during the course of the CE project. However, he has presented his research, incorporating some visual material, at the festival of community research which marked the end of the CE project. At the festival David M was able to speak to members of the public about their



Fig 4e: Material relating to his 'City Ring Project' presented by DM at 'Learning Together: A festival of Community Research' at the Leicester Adult Education College on 7th November 2009.

knowledge of walking routes in their own areas of the city. It is hoped that the contacts made by David M at the festival will help him to complete his research.

Silverstrand Club

The Silverstrand Club has been established for over twenty years to serve the needs of the Afro-Caribbean community in South Highfields. Meeting twice weekly as a lunch club in Highfields, it attracts a broad range of older people. It is quite informal in its structure. However, in recent years it has seen participation decline. Led by PT, they wanted to identify:

- new possible activities for the group;
- ways to attract new membership;
- ways to diversify the group, particularly to attract younger members.

A two-stage process followed. Firstly, the group worked out activities it would like to do, as well as talking to a range of people about what might attract them. This was originally structured as a short survey, but the group felt quite quickly that this wasn't

the best way to proceed, as they had gained enough information.

The activities garnered included:

- singing in a choir;
- nature exploration, green fingers;
- making music with instruments;
- arts and crafts sessions;
- drama group;
- grow your own food or herbs;
- creative writing;
- a local history project.

With 1:1 support, this has been fashioned into an ambitious heritage project, for which funding is now being sought, through an ongoing partnership with LVC, aimed at building permanent institutional

capacity for the group, and producing public history through mass intellectuality.

The project, with a working title of Hidden Histories, will focus on the stories which can be told of Hillcrest Hospital. This was the city's workhouse until 1939.

The hospital was demolished in 1977 and Moat Community College is now on the site.²² The project will tell stories around the development of the NHS, migration to the UK, and the nature of enduring

immigrant communities. An inclusive approach will have different levels of engagement: archival training and workshops for some, community events, oral histories, archive building, a small exhibition, storytelling, arts-based inquiry and crafting sessions aimed at those with dementia or other conditions preventing their participation.

The process will find new members for the group and build relationships with other organizations and institutions.

Rhymes

LH approached us with a broad range of possible projects. Through some reflexive sessions she identified that she wished to stimulate intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, and had a particular interest in rhymes and games. LH decided she wanted to collect nursery rhymes, from adults and older children; from younger audiences, she collected illustrations for the pamphlet she planned to create (cover reproduced as Fig. 4f).

We provided a series of training sessions which resembled aspects of academic supervision, so that LH could produce a robust piece of work and have confidence in what she was doing and that she was doing it ethically. This reflected broad ambitions on her part. She then collected a range of rhymes from a range of people from different countries and generations.

We supported her desktop publishing this material and reproducing a small run of copies to give away. A flexible approach to

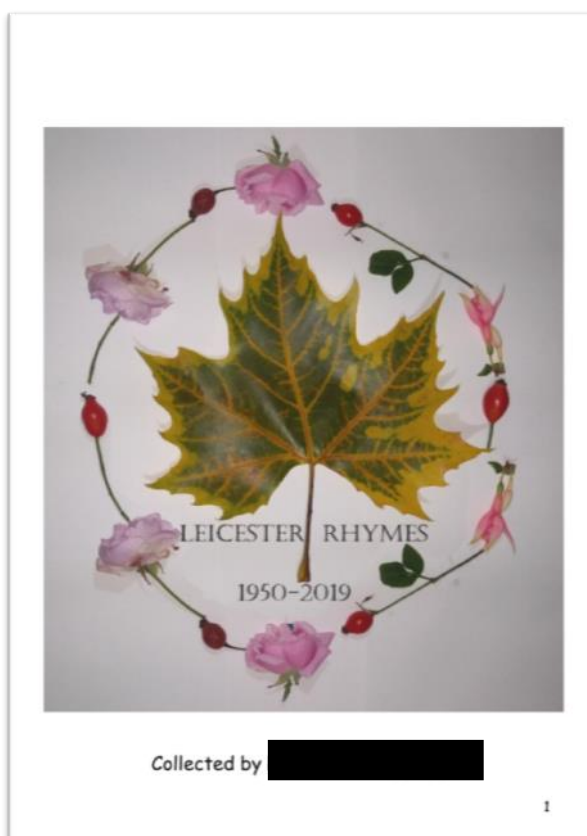


Fig 4f: Cover of the pamphlet produced

22. Historic England http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1430169

this means that she can make further changes and print off a few more, as different materials.

As a result of this approach LH had plucked up confidence to speak with a range of people with whom she might not otherwise have had contact. Higher-level research training covered topics including: ethics, research design, presenting findings. In particular, on handling printed, stapled copies of her pamphlet, she was pleased at having produced something tangible.

This kind of punk knowledge production is fundamentally democratizing, as it is

available to all with sufficient confidence, scalable and reproducible; it could be given away as here, done to cover costs, in as a commercial venture. LH is now looking at ways to take forward this work.

This project connected with all of the of the LAT Mental Wellbeing Jigsaw: in addition to learning, it encouraged self-care through activity and finding humour, taking care of mind by increasing a sense of gratitude for contributions from strangers, encouraged LH to connect with herself and developing goals through reflection, and building relationships with others and contributing.

Health Project

UV wanted to do something to support the health of older people. In close alignment with co-operative values and principles, and community development, UV wanted to do this in a self-directed way. The criteria were:

- Workshops must be interactive, hands on.
- Look to the public health needs of the South Asian community, particularly around prevention of type two diabetes.
- Engage holistically with health.

- Be self-directed by the group to support sustainability.
- Be democratic.

For personal reasons this could not be completed in the timeframe, but this Explorer is poised to make a start in early 2020. The networking and sharing event in November enabled UV to make useful contacts to get started meaningfully with this after the end of the project. This is an example how the sustained legacies left from these projects, as contacts providing spaces, small amounts of community funding, possible healthy living demonstrators have been identified.

Crowdsourced Accessibility Map

A happy synergy sits behind this useful, ongoing project. JR approached us with astonishing energy and ideas and was receptive to the idea of identifying an area where she could best help. A potential Explorer CH, with visual impairment

identified the need for an interactive map where those with a range of disabilities and access needs could share tips and advice, and to find ways to navigate the city centre. Where, for example, might someone find an accessible public lavatory? Or what

about calmer, low-stimulus shopping spaces for those hypersensitive to this such as those with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder)? JR was keen to take up this mantle, using CH as a consultant. CH himself did not want to participate as an Explorer, but enjoyed engaging in the drop-in sessions.

Together JR and CH discussed the problem at length. A 2015 Leicester City Council booklet was used as straw figure against which a new one might be designed:

- Rather than top-down, this was to be bottom-up.
- It would meet a broader range of access needs.

- The format of the end guide was considered.
- It could be updated subsequently by users too, so that it would not become out of date, and so that information could be shared in real time, or near real time- for example if there were roadworks.
- LCC would be the first target for the proposal, with the NHS and third-sector organizations as alternatives.

The final product might well be high-tech, perhaps with an app compatible with adaptive technologies, but for now JR is taking suggestions from various public groups of things to include in the map and the specification is being prepared. JR is keen to carry this forward, and has identified alternate targets if LCC does not respond positively.

Belgrave Knitters

The Belgrave Knitters had two interlinked projects. The first project involved building relationships between the knitting group and the Pukaar Group. The second was to develop the activities that their group did.

AJ came to the CE project engaged in her local community to a large extent, but lacking some of the confidence to go and do things for herself, and labouring heavily under heavy caring responsibilities. Participation has been transformative in many ways. Routine has given way to experimentation, and recalcitrance has yielded to great enthusiasm. Keen to forge meaningful links, the knitting group of which AJ is a leading light knitted a personal scarf for each of the ladies in the Pukaar Group, as an expression of



Fig 4g: (i) Belgrave Knitters are ready to present some scarves to Pukaar members. Images provided by Belgrave Knitters.

friendship, but also constituting a kind of tangible knowledge about the community of which they are all part. Such networking built links between community groups, and so embedded capacity. The project therefore facilitated different people getting to know one another.

The Belgrave Knitters were themselves feeling in something of a rut, and decided to start exploring different things they might do. We supported BM to plan expeditions to go beyond simple weekly meetings in the Belgrave library having tea and snacks, whilst knitting for an hour two.

Two possibilities quickly emerged: visiting a modern knitting factory, and comparing two framework knitting museums. As framework knitting was a very important part of Leicester's nineteenth and early twentieth-century economy, several museums are in easy reach.



Fig 4g: (ii) some members of the Pukaar group with scarves. Images provided by Belgrave Knitters.

We supported the researchers to explore the transport options for a group with differing levels of mobility, and to identify sources of funding to support this. These projects are designed to increase the capacity and activities of the groups, and have enabled them to make links and try new things. They speak optimistically of their next steps.



Fig 4h: members of the Pukaar group sporting splendid new scarves from the Belgrave Knitters. Images provided by Belgrave Knitters.

Other Projects

From approximately 24 informal expressions of interest, we had ten projects carried forward. The other individuals made approaches about projects which after planning or starting to arrange they

were unable to complete; in some other cases they were delayed or curtailed due to any number of factors, including the mental health of those participating. Potential remains in these cases.

4. Strengths and opportunities

Our co-operative, democratic approach outlined in section two, was well suited to the diverse group of Explorers we had. As the CE project occurred late in the cycle of the AB programme, we were able to learn from some of the other AB schemes, especially from events in Bristol and Sheffield, at which a broad range of projects were represented, including:

Ageing Better in Birmingham; Bristol Ageing Better; Ageing Better in Camden; Brightlife, Cheshire; T.E.D. (Ageing Better East Lindsey); Ambition for Ageing (Greater Manchester); Connecting Hackney; Age Friendly Island (Isle of Wight); Time to Shine (Leeds); Ageing Better Middlesbrough; Age Better in Sheffield; Ageless Thanet; Age Well Torbay.

Inclusivity

In learning from the participants and organizers of the AB projects at different events, perhaps the biggest variation was the diversity of those engaged in AB. In particular, we were keen to ensure that our uptake reflected the diversity of the city.

Our approach was inclusive: across ten projects, many of the city's communities were represented. With very low

thresholds to participation individuals could do it. The freeform approach of individual support and training, 1:1 mentoring, and little formal structure encouraged individuals to become independent researchers. In particular, a greater diversity of educational backgrounds was represented than we would have expected looking at other projects.

Free choice and empowerment

In order to empower individuals, and in line with the educational values set out above, we were especially keen to see that Explorers exercised the greatest possible autonomy and, insofar as possible a free choice over topics. The limits to this were bounded ethically: not only did research have to be ethical, but Explorers had to

have a reasonable expectation of making substantial progress in relation to what they sought to do in the timeframe available. Legacies and sustainability are discussed below in section 8. When encouraged to reflect on the CE scheme many expressed ideas related to empowerment.

Connexions made with other groups

Two of the three aims identified by LAT related to sustainability and connections. This was embedded in the project on two levels. Firstly, on individual project levels, generally after concepts had been proved, we sought ways to empower Explorers to continue after the end of the work. This might involve how to find small funds,

spaces to meet, help with refreshments. Secondly, through the celebration event in November all members had opportunities to make connections. We had plans on how to facilitate networking, but in fact the Explorers did this instinctively and automatically. Together they will support each other as a resource after the project.

Increased self-esteem, confidence

Many Explorers expressed that they felt confident, connected, inspired, liberated, and eager, when we workshopped feedback with them (see section seven). An approach

which mirrored ABCD and drew on adult education ideas about respecting the ideas of the learner paid clear dividends.

5. Challenges faced and lessons learned

Some lessons were learned from this project.

- Originally six months long, this was clearly too short for such a project. In order to allow things to develop naturally and for the time needed to build relationships and trust, we think a project like this needs to run for at least a year. We worked hard to manage expectations, and were clear about the scope of the project from the start, but many Explorers expressed frustrations with the timeframe.
- Linked to this, is the issue of needing at least one full-time facilitator in order to meet the needs of Explorers.
- Some kind of participation agreement might replace the application process. By doing this it could facilitate project design, agree timescales, and plans of action. However, it is not possible to oblige or force volunteers to do anything, and in any case, most had good reasons when they were unable to make the progress they hoped. Maintaining enthusiasm and motivation in this context was not always easy.
- Our flexible approach, which paid great dividends, made it harder to establish a brand for the CE project.
- Some Explorers considered working with vulnerable people, and where there were human participants, this was difficult. As LVC had experienced academics, we were able to help shape and assess projects and assure them through a de facto light touch procedure. Questions remain about how to address this had the projects undertaken by Explorers been different.
- Despite efforts, we failed to reach some communities successfully. In particular approaches through organizations such as PYCA did not yield much uptake despite visiting, introductions and providing materials.
- We are aware that in terms of results there was some duplication of work done by LAT – around transport and a possible toolkit for community groups starting up. We stress, however, that although findings of the diverse research projects are valuable, the objective was for them to gain skills and confidence in the process of doing it: in summary it was the means, not the end, that was the key concern here.
- Participants were mostly already known to LAT, as many came through advertising by Community Connectors. This enabled us to prove the value of the flexible, co-operative approach we took, but did mean the majority were not new participants. In any case, we had no mechanism by which we were able to turn people away; had new participants been a serious requirement it would have needed at least six months more to find those with no established relationship to LAT or other related services.

6. Looking backwards: a festival of exploration

In November we had a celebration event. It had three key objectives:

- to celebrate the hard work and share findings of the projects;
- to enable Explorers to network with each other and understand how they could act as a resource;
- to offer time and space for Explorers to reflect on their journey.

The workshop was designed largely by the Explorers themselves: they wanted to do some collaging, they wanted to share their findings, and some space to meet with each other.

A collaging session started with word association and then collaging based on these terms. The terms are shown in the following table:

Word association	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surprised • Enlightened • Confidence • Inspired • Challenged • Connected • Exploring (literally) • Healthy • Heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship • Inspiration • Liberation • Insight • Curiosity • Doubt • Eagerness • Confidence • Communication

Collages produced in pairs and trios saw members of different projects reflect together, and work with each other to produce representations of the experiences they had had as Explorers. This was the

kind of evaluation exercise the Explorers wanted to have on the project, and we were struck by the confidence and positivity of the messages.

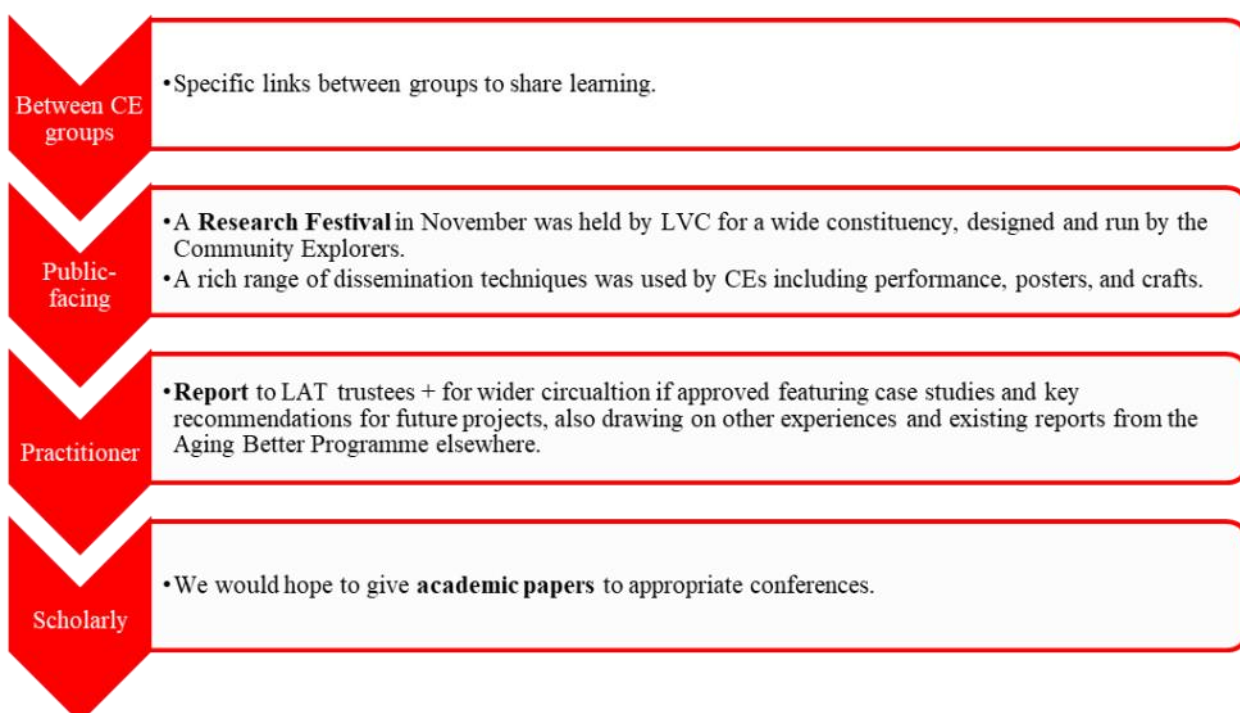


7. Looking forward: legacies

Dissemination

We have sought, and seek, to share our findings with a broad audience. This report is made freely available to interested parties. We have given papers and expect to publish a scholarly article or chapter on the co-operative nature of our approach. More importantly, we have supported CEs to share what they have learned with each other and with different community groups. Our approach was grounded in four underpinning intellectual ideas.

- Firstly, that of co-production of knowledge and events. So in holding an event, we will support CEs to take control of the shape and function of the day.
- Secondly, this is the idea of mass intellectuality, at its simplest that in a collective we all make valid contributions and know more than any individual could.
- Thirdly, through an outward-facing approach we seek to engage public and policy audiences.
- Finally, we seek to continually demystify research, stemming from the notion of student-as-producer, by laying open the process, reflecting honestly, and encouraging participation.



1. One paper on 'Co-operative research and age-friendly cities: lessons from the Community Explorers project at Leicester Vaughan College', by Malcolm Noble and Ann Stones, was given at a conference 'The Way Ahead: linking new research on co-operatives and the social economy with practical initiatives' held at UCLAN, University of Central Lancashire, on Wednesday, 13 November 2019.
2. Following the paper (1), we have been included in discussions about a post-conference publication writing on the project.

Four steps to sustainability

We see the sustainable elements of this project as clustered in four areas which are interconnected.

Firstly, we expect the various activities to continue after the end of this Project. The Project has facilitated and empowered groups and individuals within local communities to address problems, concerns or questions that were important to them through the use of a range of research methods. Much of this research is still ongoing but groups and individuals now have the skills and confidence to continue their research after the project has ended. The schemes and activities are going, independent concerns. The learning festival functioned successfully as a springboard to expanded sustainability.

Secondly, individuals, embedded in their communities, have gained confidence, skills and abilities to approach all areas of their lives with resourcefulness and confidence. The learning is not bounded, and can be used in all areas of their lives, transforming and improving.

Thirdly, the logical corollary of individual empowerment is that this is shared in communities through community capacity building. Groups of Explorers have been supported to plan and implement research,

to organise tasks and to take on new roles. In some cases this has provided opportunities for group members who may previously had little responsibility in running the group to become involved, to develop new skills, so building community capacity. The project has also enabled members of LVC staff who are working on the project to develop new skills of their own and to develop stronger working relationships with the local community and LAT partner organisations.



Finally, at the highest level, this seeks to influence and change policy. Some of our Explorers are working on projects that they hope to present to authorities in order to influence local policy and practice, such as the accessibility map (see section 4.9). This will present a list of recommendations based on the needs expressed by those with disabilities in the hope that a new, improved version of the map can be produced. On a broader scale, it is hoped that the LAT Community Explorers Project

might pave the way towards Leicester becoming an 'Age Friendly City'. One of the criteria for that status, as set out by World Health Organisation under a section on civic participation and employment, is that 'a range of flexible options for older volunteers is available, with training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs'.²³

Each of these strands is powerful, but in combination can be transformative for individual lives, groups and communities.

23. *World Health Organisation, 'Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities' (2007) p. 3, at https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf [accessed 1st September 2019]

8. Conclusion: what have we learned about community research?

The power of social and co-operative pedagogies and ABCD

We have learned that the interlinked concepts of social pedagogy and asset based community development help individuals and groups to learn, to grow, and to make full use of previously

unrecognised assets in order to reach their full potential. Co-operative approaches by default are inclusive and well-suited to achieve community development objectives.

Sustainability framework

We have planned for sustainability from the outset of the project. We have adopted an ABCD approach supporting and encouraging participants to take ownership of their projects and helping

them to acquire the skills they might need to continue their research after the end of the project. Future iterations might use the sustainability strands explicitly in planning with individuals from the outset.

A need for flexibility

We have learned to be flexible in our approach to research, in our understandings of the issues that matter to participants, in the methods that they choose to adopt to research those issues, and in the ways that they choose to share

their findings. In many cases this has meant adopting 'non-traditional' research methods such as the use of arts and craft. We believe that such a flexible approach helps to demystify the research process and make it more accessible and inclusive.

Time is needed

More time than expected was needed for publicity, recruitment, and particularly for building relationships with community groups. We have appreciated the support of community connectors in this. However,

with more time, we may have engaged more people. We have also learned to be aware of, and allow for, the effects of illness, hospital appointments, family/carers responsibilities, work and other

commitments on the time that Explorers are able to allocate to their research

In conclusion it is clear that sustainability is not all about securing extra funding, it is also about people, their commitment and enthusiasm, about crafting and maintaining relationships, about building community capacity, about utilising and developing community assets and about collaborative and co-operative working. It is hoped that the lasting legacy of the Community Explorers Project will be that Explorers and the wider community will continue to benefit from skills gained and

relationships established during the course of the project.

The Community Explorers Project has been closely aligned to LAT's Mental Well Being Model. This is a holistic model linking learning to taking care of the body, taking care of the mind, connecting with others and connecting with oneself (see section 2.4). The pertinence of the alignment between community research and mental wellbeing is evident in the positive self-reported impact that the project has had on Explorers.

Co-operative approaches

The deployment of LVC's co-operative values has offered a powerful framework for this project, especially in a tight timeframe with limited resources. It would be possible to compare with the kind of socio-economic groups engaged in other Community Explorer projects as part of Ageing Better and reflect very positively on what has been achieved. A commitment to diversity and representativeness and education for, and as, social justice has framed our approach. The co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity sit at the heart of this, as well co-operative pedagogies. All this manifested in three key ways.

Firstly, we sought to enable any person approaching us to explore the issues which mattered to them. The ten projects which manifested from this were rich and varied, and encompass a broad range of social issues. In many cases the project itself aimed directly to produce the benefits, such as an accessible map of the city centre; in all cases individual and

community capacity was created through the skills and confidence gained by individuals and organizations embedded in their communities.

Secondly, we were convinced that it was vital that Explorers have their individual needs met. This meant more time-consuming individual training and supervision, but by doing this we could tailor sessions to interests and previous levels of educational achievements. However, keen that Explorers build connections with each other, drop-ins and other occasions created spaces for different Explorers and groups to engage informally, build links and, most importantly, learn from and support each other.

Finally, we grounded this in co-operative ways of learning and knowing. Ideas of mass intellectuality and alternative ways of knowing were applied across the projects, including in the arts-based inquiry used in evaluation. The arts and crafts projects, for examples, formed quietly radical ways of knowing the world,

both for the knitters making social meaning through exchanging scarves and the WISCP crafting workshops giving voice to those otherwise unable so to do. Crowdsourced maps represent a more democratic knowledge. The Pukaar Group trip to Fosse Park privileged the experiential, as did Urmila's sight-loss project.

Learning together

In these different projects, we saw individuals empowered and confident to use research – broadly defined – to address problems around mobilities, disability, community and health. Practical solutions, capacity, and confidence were developed:

- to empower people to use research in order to solve problems in their lives;
- to encourage them to find ways to continue in doing this after the end of the project;
- to realise their potential to act as a resource in solving community problems.

The Explorers and facilitators all learned together on this project, engaged in open and reflective dialogue with each other about how it functioned, what it achieved, and with candour considered limitations. However, the powerful combination of co-operative approaches enabled a diverse group of people to pursue a broad range of topics in ways which suited them. Lasting legacies of connections and capacities have represented powerful leverage on modest funds. Moreover, it is clear that co-operative pedagogies and formations offer real value to community work like this.

Appendix I

Community Research Project Proposal

The project would be structured around three key aims. These are to:

1. Empower people to use research in order to solve problems in their lives.
2. Encourage them to find ways to continue in doing this after the end of the project.
3. To realise their potential to act as a 'resource' in solving community problems.

Staff from Vaughan would aim to provide guidance and support for the community researchers as well as helping them to find the right tools to develop and maintain their projects. We recommend that each team of researchers receive an allocated amount.

Activity	Time Frame	Estimated Days	Including
Project Start up Gaining ethical approval Organising venues timing and venues for workshops Developing 'aids to research' pack for distribution at workshops	December	4 days	Travel expenses for meeting researchers within the community
Workshops: Introductory workshops to be attended by representatives of the research teams/ or individual researcher. These will make use of Open Educational Research Resources where appropriate. Topics to cover could include Managing your research budget Finding and managing information Ethics in research/data protection Safe guarding Critical assessment of information and reflection as a tool for developing ideas Another half day would consist of 1 to 1 sessions for each community research group to give advice of workability of the proposed projects. The costing for this is under mentoring and admin-	January and February	6 days (including tutor preparation time) Two workshops per day (which would help to meet the timeframe) with lunch in between the two sessions to encourage attendance and help to provide a more friendly approach.	Room hire at LEAC and refreshments. These workshops may also need to be repeated to community groups within the community in local venues. Therefore venue hire and transport costs need to be accounted for.

Activity	Time Frame	Estimated Days	Including
<p>Specialised workshops:</p> <p>Run on demand and can be replaced with alternatives if particular needs arose in the course of the research.</p> <p>These could include workshops on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting and preserving material for future researchers and projects [EP] How to get your project noticed (social media, blogging and networks) Pros and cons of websites Public policy impact – (empowering research to deploy the conclusions of their research appropriately in civil society and public institutions with a view to informing policy choices). 	March and April	4 days (including preparation time)	May need to be delivered more than once in other venue/direct to groups
<p>Mentoring</p> <p>Mentoring will entail individual support for each group. It might take the form of face to face sessions either at LASALs or at community venues, phone calls or email contact.</p> <p>Meeting researchers and building contacts with Ageing Together partner organisations to discuss what to research and being realistic</p> <p>Continued support throughout the project via frequent meetings to discuss progress and advise about steps</p>	<p>December</p> <p>January to June</p>	<p>4 days</p> <p>13 days</p>	<p>How many venues to book? Assume 10 groups having monthly 1 to 1 sessions?</p> <p>Transport to community venues.</p>

Activity	Time Frame	Estimated Days	Including
Project Manager The Project Manager will Take responsibility for delivery of agreed outputs Develop, organise and deliver the programme of workshops and be 'in attendance' at the workshops as an assistant to the tutor taking the workshop. Make sure the correct procedures are followed and oversee ethical approval and safe guarding help the researchers to develop strategies so the projects can continue beyond the end of the parent project. support the researchers in relation to practical matters to produce their table displays for the Older People's Conference Liaise with relevant stakeholders and report on progress at relevant intervals about fulfilment of project outcomes. literature survey and/or report for dissemination, preferably co-authored with researchers.	January to June	52 days	
Total		Total days: 77	
Cost			
Delivery of Project		£20,000	
'Seed corn' funding to community researchers		£5,000	
Total		£25,000	

Appendix II

Fosse Park Accessibility Survey

Conducted by Pukaar Group (18 October 2019)

The purpose of this survey is to investigate the ease with which a group of people with disabilities is able to visit Fosse Park for a day and enjoy its retail and catering outlets.

The group consists of people with a range of mobility issues and includes several wheelchair users.

The information gathered in this survey may be shared with other disabled groups and, if any particularly accessibility issues are identified, with the local council, the management of Fosse Park individual outlets, and transport providers.

<p>Transport (consider ease of booking, ramps or lifts, how many wheelchairs accommodated, wheelchair clamps/seatbelts, will driver assist with clamping? cost etc.)</p>	<p>The group travelled in individual wheelchair taxis. Booking (in advance) was not a problem. The vehicles used met the needs of the group. Drivers were all helpful and assisted with getting in and out of vehicles and securing wheelchairs in vehicles. Taxis were able to park close to shops with no difficulty in order for passengers to alight and board safely.</p>
<p>Retail outlets, consider width of aisles, lifts, entrances, thresholds, are goods on display visible/reachable from wheelchairs?</p>	<p>Generally really good. Aisles generally wide enough. Entrances all accessible. Staff very helpful (e.g. staff in Primark opened up accessible till for members of group.) The group would particularly like to thank staff at Primark, Boots, and Marks and Spencer. Sometimes, however, there were not enough staff around, for example to reach down items for electric wheelchair or mobility scooter users who were shopping without a carer and could not reach goods they were interested in buying. It was also noted that few retail outlets had seating areas where frail or elderly shoppers could rest if needed. Sometimes the only available sitting was in the footwear departments where sitting was quite low and difficult for some members of the group to use.</p>

<p>Catering outlets, consider entrances, space for wheelchairs at and between tables, how many wheelchair users can be accommodated at once.</p>	<p>On the day of the group's visit, building work was still in progress at the food court. The only catering outlets available were in McDonalds and Marks and Spencer. Prior to the visit the group had decided to decline an offer by the manager of Fosse Park to arrange to cordon off a seating area for them in one of the outlets because the group were keen to 'mingle'. This may have been a mistake on the part of the group because outlets were very busy and there was very little space for a group of wheelchair users. The group split into two, some eating at the larger Marks and Spencer café and others at the smaller Marks and Spencer café. Staff at the larger café were really helpful, and extremely kind and patient, even though they were obviously very busy, they answered questions about the menu and moved furniture in order to accommodate members of the group who ate there. The group would like to thank the staff there. However, members of the group who ate at the smaller café felt that staff were not nearly so helpful and were quite abrupt at times.</p>
<p>Toilet facilities – disabled toilet facilities, enough space, hand rails, lower level sinks, raised toilets, changing tables, if disabled toilets locked how easy is it to get key? Etc.</p>	<p>Again, because of building work, accessible toilets in the food court were not available. The group used accessible toilets in Marks and Spencer. One of the two accessible toilets there was out of order on the day of the visit. Inside the accessible toilet cubicle used, it was felt that space was quite tight for a carer to transfer a wheelchair user from a large wheelchair to the toilet. It was helpful that cubicle doors opened outwards, but this meant that space in the waiting area was also quite cramped; it was felt that more space is also needed in the waiting area (this is particularly an issue when several wheelchair users are waiting). The group wonders thinks it would be helpful if there was a 'changing places' toilet available at Fosse Park (http://www.changing-places.org/find_a_toilet.aspx) and wonder if this is part of the plans in the current regeneration</p>
<p>Outside space – car parks, pavements, crossings, curbs, surfaces, gradients/cambers etc.</p>	<p>The group felt that accessibility in outside areas was very good. Even though building work is in progress effort has obviously been made to maintain accessibility. There were some slight gradients in places but nothing that was considered to pose a problem. The group felt that more outside seating areas would be helpful for those in need of a rest.</p>
<p>Miscellaneous – any other issues?</p>	<p>The group felt that it might be helpful to have toilet facilities in the mobility shop.</p>

Index

- ABCD1, 4, 6, 33
- accessible cities 14-16, 21-22
- age-friendly Cities32
- retail40
- catering41
- Ageing Better2-3, 25
- Bristol2, 3, 25
- Leeds2, 3, 25
- Scarborough3
- Settle3
- arts-based inquiry12-13, 17-18, 19, 20-21, 22-23
- collaging28-29
- knitting22-23, 35
- painting13
- capacity building, see ABCD
- confidence building26
- connexions within communities22, 25
- co-operative approaches and pedagogies1, 4
- co-operative education3-4
- Wilkins' Framework5
- co-operative ethics and values1, 34
- co-operative values3
- Crafting Relationships12-13
- crowdsourcing21-22
- decolonizing histories4
- Dementia-Friendly colours13
- democratic practices1
- dissemination of findings30-31
- ethics12, 27, 36
- ethnographic approaches3
- free choice25
- healthy living21
- history1, 4, 18-19, 19-20, 20-21, 23
- ICA3
- inclusivity25
- intergenerational dialogue20-21
- knowledges, plural approaches to1
- LAT1, 2
- LVC1, 2
- Mental Wellbeing Model, LAT1, 6-7, 34
- mobility15-16, 18-19, 40-41
- National Lottery2
- participation agreements27
- Participatory Action Research4
- poetry20-21
- recruitment, open approaches to1, 8-10
- bureaucracy and10
- reflexive practice28-29
- research, broad approaches to35
- resources36-38
- resources for projects27
- retail14, 16, 21, 35, 40-41
- RNIB11
- sustainability21-32, 33, 35
- sustainability framework33
- time frames for projects27
- transport, see mobility
- VISTA11
- visual impairment11
- WEA9, 11, 18

