

"We're really centralising the people who are both telling the stories and collecting the stories, and make sure they are confident and trained."

2020 - 2021

SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

PEOPLE'S VOICE MEDIA



<https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>



OUR IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

Hello! In case you haven't heard about us before, People's Voice Media is a social change charity, committed to working with people and their lived experience to make our communities better places to be. We do this through Community Reporting, which is a digital storytelling method that supports people to be involved in research, policy-making, service development, and decision-making processes.

This annual social impact report is based on a series of reflective interviews with people we've worked with during the year about their experiences of working with us. We've used these stories to help identify the difference we make to people, organisations and wider society. Enjoy!

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Between April 2020 and March 2021, we achieved:

- **1 annual conference**
- **27 social change projects**
- **26 Trainers**
- **101 Community Reporters**
- **247 lived experience stories**
- **75,362 Zoom calls (approx.)**

All powered by 12,098,675 cups of (Yorkshire) tea... whilst navigating a global pandemic, not bad going, eh?

We couldn't have achieved this alone - so a massive "thank you" to the people we've worked with this year.

"It was definitely a partnership. I felt that from the beginning."

"It was very good to be able to see some of the people who've maybe been less involved really thrive."

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT

Sometimes it's easiest to see the tangible - or more immediate - results of our work on an individual level, where the people we work with, and ourselves, develop new skills and ideas. This might involve digital skills or personal skills, such as working as a team. It could also entail changes in our thinking.

This year, we worked alongside a women's group who are part of Inspiring Change Manchester. This Women's Voices project sought to use storytelling as a tool for advocacy, and as part of this work we trained up MASH staff as Community Reporter trainers. Speaking about the impact on participants, they told us that:

It was very good to be able to see some of the people who've maybe been less involved really thrive. Especially when we were teaching people ourselves, some people really came out of themselves. And the impact on at least one, who's now gone on to do other things and is really, really thriving.





This really made our day. The impact here isn't necessarily about conventional upskilling, but about creating spaces that people can springboard from into other great ventures. Our work has also supported reflection, as one of the Women's Voices Community Reporter Trainers puts it:


For me it was actually being interviewed ... that had the biggest impact. ... I learned a lot of stuff about myself just from that interview with her and I keep reflecting on it.

Creating spaces like this - not only in which we can be heard by others, but also hear ourselves - allows people space for reflection, promoting personal development within social change-making environments.

Other people involved in our work this year found connection during the Community Reporting process. One Community Reporter on a project that sought to address health inequalities project in South West Yorkshire said:

I found a community of people who were quite passionate about seeing change. ... It was good to know that the change was quite immediate... It wasn't just the training for me.

Instead, the training confirmed and validated things that she was already thinking about, such as:



I realised I could work with [her child's] nursery to co-produce content that celebrates his brownness...I then went on a journey appreciating my own culture. The training came in at the right time to boost my confidence.

This was something she was already planning, but the discussions within the project reinforced the fact that it was worth doing. This individual, who was born in Ghana went on to launch her own Africaniwa project, a community of lovers of photo and photography who aim to use photographs from Africa in order to challenge perceptions and shine a light on realities.

A key part of our work is to create spaces in which lived experience is listened to and valued. In another health inequalities project that took place in North Kirklees, funded by NHS Charities Together, one person said:

People enjoyed telling us about their experiences because it felt like, for them, that their voices were being heard.

Creating these types of spaces allows our perceptions and own biases to be challenged. In our collaboration with the Camerados group that explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people, one person shared with us how this was their motivation for getting involved:

My reason for wanting to share my story is to give some information about what it's like as a parent going through the pandemic with a child that has special educational needs and the impact that the pandemic has had on the support that individual received and how that impacted on us as a wider family.

People's experiences show us, that this year, our impact on individuals has been rooted in creating opportunities and platforms for people to have their voices heard, set the agenda and connect with their own individual power and capacity.

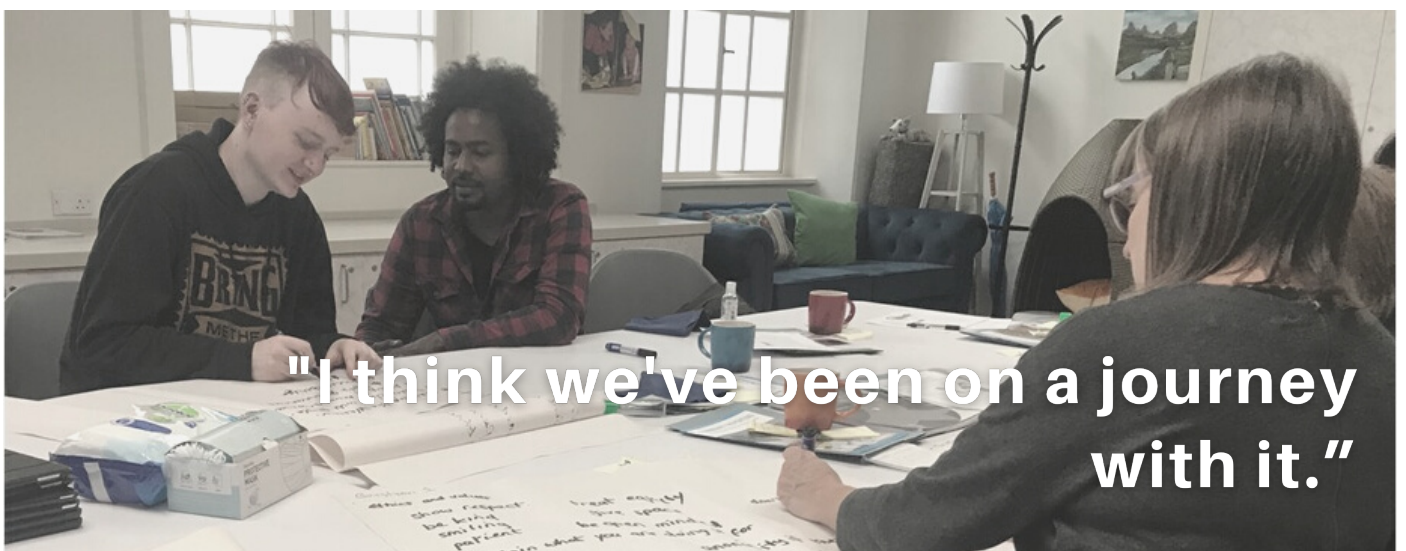
"The skills that the staff have taken from the process, we will take forward."

ORGANISATIONAL IMPACT

When thinking about the impact that we have at an organisational level, we are considering how our work changes the way organisations operate and deliver their services and thus how this impacts on the people they support. We are also looking at how our work with groups and communities contributes to neighbourhoods developing and people working effectively together. In the last year, we've seen many of our projects sow these seeds and the snippets of experiences in this section, represent some of the change-making we've been a part of.

One thing that really warms the cockles of our hearts is when we hear that the skills and learning from our projects will continue to be used in the future. Reflecting on a piece of work we did in North Kirklees around COVID-19 and health inequalities, one of the organisers said:

So much support is needed right now and if we can support them [the community] with these interventions then we're all for that. So, I think it's really helped us as well, at the Trust, to think



"I think we've been on a journey with it."



about having these conversations with community partners and for them to then put on these interventions to support these communities.

Hearing organisations take on these values at that level is a real source of pride for us. When you have that organisational buy-in, great things can happen for people and communities on a much broader scale.

Of course, embracing Community Reporting is not always an immediate thing for organisations. A project commissioned by For Housing saw us work with Ideas Alliance, Creators of Change, and Be More Pirate to better understand the wellbeing needs of communities living in neighbourhoods that For Housing worked in. The initial response of some in the organisation was that the storytellers weren't saying what they wanted to hear as *"the experiences that people are having aren't chiming with the way the organisation feels it wants to go."* They go on to add:

There was quite a powerful story in Stockbridge village about the impact that [closing offices] had had on somebody and when that was fed back the reaction was, 'Well, we can't say that.' And it's like, well, we haven't said it, somebody else has said it because that's what happened to them. ... I think the organisation maybe wasn't quite

prepared for the feedback that you can get through listening to people's stories.

This shows that there can be a degree of fear around the power-sharing that comes with really listening to and working with people's lived experience. Despite this initial discomfort, For Housing has since taken on-board the level of depth that listening to stories can add, say that *"it's rich data that will add value."* They consider the Community Reporting process to be a marathon rather than a sprint:

I think we've been on a journey with it, so it's getting easier to have those conversations.


To support people to continue their journeys with working with lived experience as a tool for change, we deliver training-the-trainer activities to embed our know-how into organisations and communities. Our Women's Voices partners who undertook our train the trainer programme told us of our work with us that *"it was definitely a partnership, I felt that from the beginning."* This partnership dynamic has really helped define the way forward for the group:

I have learned a lot from working with yourselves... We're really centralising the people who are both telling the stories and collecting the stories, and make sure they are confident, and trained, and gained skills, and can go off and use these skills and do what they want with these skills using a proven methodology and be part of a wider movement.

They go on to add that Community Reporting is *"something we advocate now,"* and that:

with other projects, there's an end and then you move on, I don't think we're going to move on from this for a very long time. I think it's something that we'll keep revisiting, especially now that we can deliver the training ourselves to new women who come into the group.

We won't lie, this comment made our day.



This year, one of our larger projects - CoSIE - was coming to an end. CoSIE sought to enhance public services across Europe through co-creation and we were supporting pilots to embed lived experience storytelling into their work. In the Finnish pilot, using Community Reporting and stories meant that the “*young people weren’t just decorations in the workshops, they were equal participants*”. One of the key team members in the pilot added:

I think the stories had tremendous impact in the pilot because they formed a basis for what we did after that. We created four profiles for the target group... and we planned our Living Labs and hackathons on these profiles.

In the Hungarian pilot, Community Reporting helped people involved to reflect and share learning, which helped build a sense of community:

It is a very useful tool for project owners, participants and other stakeholders because it helps participants to articulate their minds on their present and previous situations. They are able to articulate the results on the surface and also on a deeper level. It helps them to grow their motivation and a useful technique to develop the local community.

From these stories, we can see that working with lived experience is not always quick or easy, but when we take the time to actively listen to people’s stories and seek to understand where they are coming from, change can really flourish. New ways of thinking and doing emerge, and it’s not ‘just a project’ but a continued practice. What we know we need to do, is get better at preparing organisations for the positive disruption that our work can cause. This should involve supporting the people who are advocating within their own organisations for work like ours to take place and be valued, to be the catalyst for change.

"It makes visible the results. It is one of the most important results of the project."

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

When we talk about ‘systemic impact’, we are talking about changes that are connected to the work we do that go beyond individual organisations or communities and into wider society. This is always hard to evidence and often not one of the immediate visible results. When thinking about our impact in this arena, we try to view it as being the work we are doing that is catalysing, contributing to or are connected into wider social changes. This part of the report reflects on this arena.

This ability to share the results with others outside of the project helps word to spread and can inform

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and influence others to take on-board the learning from our work in new environments. Reflecting on this, as a team we feel that this is something we can improve and think more strategically about how we use the insights and learnings from people's lived experiences beyond the boundaries of individual projects.

The work we've done on the CoSIE is part of a wider paradigmatic shift in public services in terms of how they operate, moving away from traditional, purely top-down structures and towards more people-orientated ways of working. Our work is a part of helping institutions to 're-humanise' and put people at the heart of what they do. Echoing this sentiment, the policy advisor leading the Dutch pilot said:

It's not rocket science. It's a basic thing that as a civil servant we tend to have an agenda - a well-meaning agenda but an agenda nonetheless. [Community Reporting] took us away from our agenda and allowed people to make their own.

This sort of shift, putting power in the hands of communities, is the kind of impact that we strive for, and it is impact that can push towards wider systemic changes.

In other work, there are also signs of wider influence connected to our work. In the North Kirklees health inequalities project, the NHS's project coordinator told us that:

Going forward I just hope that we get to put on the best possible interventions for people in the communities so that we can help reduce health inequality.

Our Women's Voices partners, meanwhile, said that, "the Conversation of Change event can really turn some tables," as it puts the findings of our project in front of decision makers.

We also connect people working in social change together through events like our annual conference. A charity worker who regularly uses co-creation, told us that what really stood out for him was:

...the diversity, in terms of it was spread over a few days and there were different elements you could tap in to...[What also stood out was] connecting and hearing other people's stories.

Although the conference was online, it still provided a platform for people to be heard and to connect. Another attendee – a Co-production Development Manager – said that the event:

...put a bit of fire back in my belly to take into my own job... I was inspired to explore those conversations with people who were also grappling with it.

Always great to hear that our work initiates conversations elsewhere!

From the reflections, we can see how our work is supporting people to break down ingrained top-down power structures in society, but this does take time. Some of our project's catalyse action but it is important to remember that we are not on our own. Our work contributes to a wider shift and it is important that we stay connected with other change-makers on this road.

KEY LEARNINGS

WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL

- Creating spaces for people to be heard
- Developing people's understanding of the value of lived experience
- Challenging existing perspectives and catalysing new ways of doing and thinking
- Working alongside people and in partnership
- Facilitating change-making processes in organisations and services

WHERE WE COULD BE BETTER

- Preparing the people and organisations we work with for the positive disruption our work can bring about
- Providing more individual and collective support to our Community Reporter network so that they can catalyse and lead change in their environments
- Sharing the results of our work more widely and connecting more with other actors and change-makers in our arena

"Everybody should be involved in every stage. It shouldn't just be roll people in when you want them to tell you the good quotes and then roll them away again and leave the 'adults' to do the actual work. "

PUTTING LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

As an organisation who is committed to learning and evolving, it is important for us to work with what we've learned this year and implement it in the way we do things.

Our core commitments to take this learning forward are:

- 1) Continue** to create spaces for people to be heard, advocate and provide platforms for diverse voices and continue to work alongside people to support them to use the power of lived experience to effect change where they are.
- 2) Enhance** how we provide continued support to the Community Reporter network both on an individual and organisational basis.
- 3) Change** our approach to external communications; we want to be less about 'broadcasting' what we do and more about creating conversations with others.





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