

## Research: Common Interests and Issues

**Facilitators:** Graham Duncan - CEO St Mary's Church

Janet Harris - SCHARR, University of Sheffield

**Workshop Participants:** Approximately 36

### Summary

- The importance of developing an evidence base around innovation in community services
- Demonstrating effective partnerships
- Collaboration and co-design particularly important and valid – evidence shows this kind of work results in higher recruitment to research studies, lower dropout rates and greater participation
- Importance of equal partnership between academia and CVS
  - Provided example of collaboration with SHU, successful bid which resulted in funding for small project
    - Gave credibility to work
    - Gave confidence to VS that their work could create impact

Some discussion from this final point in the room:

- VS participants felt an understanding of research process essential
- Understanding this might entail a cost in terms of time/monetary for voluntary sector but this would enable clarity, understanding and help to equalise partnership
- Suggestion that Universities could make free places available on RTP modules for VS staff, to provide the training and understanding that would go some way to enabling a more equal partnership

Attendees were asked to think about what they saw as important and what did they want to talk about during the course of the workshops.

Question	Flipchart
Where do we start?	<p>Matchmaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask faculty executive board to fund a service/portal, identify a broker(s)</li><li>• Cross university</li></ul> <p>Austerity Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the issue</li><li>• Researcher/PhD reviews existing research</li><li>• Research gaps identified – action research developed – solution-focussed approach – lobby</li></ul> <p>Shared understanding/language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hook up with matchmakers</li><li>• Consider how to payback contributions</li><li>• Include community costs in funding applications</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jargon busting</li> </ul> <p>Working together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matchmaker links</li> <li>• Share case studies of partnerships working</li> <li>• Identify benefits of community based topics</li> </ul>
<b>What are the first steps in working together to:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a funding pipeline and identify research topics?</li> <li>• Start public mental health and community research?</li> <li>• Use research to make changes/improvements in what we do?</li> <li>• Develop methods for evaluating complex interventions?</li> </ul>
<b>Getting “Good Thinking” or wisdom into practice</b>	The curator/in-between person(s) could be a student (research). They liaise with community/voluntary sector to pull together research current and done in other places or conflict them with current research projects, from here take the results and the students help community/voluntary sector put into practice and students gain skills and experience benefitting the wider community.
<b>More ideas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to have a single point of entry as well as a broker for community members/groups/organisations to be able to connect with academics, PhD students and researchers. When they have a project/problem/issue they are interested in collaborating with a university partner on. Would also be where both community partners could say what their areas of focus or interest are</li> <li>• Matchmaking, submit to FEB for funding a post (should this be cross-university)</li> <li>• Build capacity: bank of university researchers skilled in community research and community (peer) researchers</li> </ul>
<b>Practical ideas for projects to take forward</b>	<p><b><u>Impact</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Janet Harris workshop on tools and measuring</li> <li>• Longitudinal studies to show the long term impacts on people community system</li> <li>• Can we link up organisations to look for impact collaboratively</li> <li>• Impact workshops – getting practical with academics</li> <li>• Training for 3<sup>rd</sup> sector on impact, so they feel more confident</li> <li>• Can someone look at impact tool and validate it?</li> <li>• Build a data collection plan for gathering impact area</li> <li>• Defining impact to encompass all perspectives (like a balanced scorecard)</li> <li>• Potential impact tools – library/space to share/add to</li> <li>• Would be helpful and interesting to first discuss how we are understanding impact</li> <li>• Would like to explore the 2 levels or the spectrum of impact from short-term/surface level impact that is easily captured/measured/evaluated to the deeper structural or long-term impact that is very difficult to capture/evaluate but is arguably what many are striving for what universities should be doing</li> <li>• Impact’s not the end -&gt; continuous improvement</li> <li>• Help with developing a framework to measure impact of what we do</li> <li>• Making more use of students to aid voluntary/community groups develop as a result of research – students gain experience and potentially create opportunities for themselves and others</li> <li>• Impact can mean different things for separate organisations</li> </ul>

- Different funders have different forms of evaluating impact at the end of a project
- What would a voluntary organisation like to measure impact vs what a university may want to measure as impact
- Common understanding and definition of what is meant by impact
- Shared approach to understanding, capturing and measuring impact

### **Connecting, Sharing and Collaboration**

- Community led neighbourhood led 'evaluation' – who decides and how?
- ScHARR lunch lectures – can they be opened up?
- Sustrans and SHU bike life report
- Department for Lifelong Learning, Active Community Learning – Discover Project, outreach faster programmes
- Development of evidence-based theory of change model for wider impacts (of improved language skills)
- Way of sharing evaluation best practice and tools across organisations
- How to shape a sustainable care system
- We'd like someone to help us develop a theory of change
- The uni has various faculty partnership teams. Let voluntary organisations know about these as a possible way in to meet relevant researchers/students
- Help projects develop, income – generating ideas to remove them from funding cycles
- Creating partnerships with researchers and voluntary organisations to offer experience and collaborative research – creates impact for researchers and the organisations
- Partnering university students with voluntary organisations on specific projects, more informal systems
- Data collection and collation input by University staff volunteers
- Information sharing – is there facility for university to share what's happening
- Linking needs of TSDs with the uni curriculum
- Having an evaluation portal where organisations/university can post and find similar evaluations and work together
- Having a uni portal of academics, modules, students, researchers wanting to work with local organisations/community and their topic/areas of interest
- Could the unis offer voluntary sector 'desk' -> brokerage service -> academic staff to make links with voluntary organisations for their proposed research
- Could VAB/VAS/VAR do this together? – Janet Wheatley start a conversation?
- Create a region wide 'voluntary action' network form local voluntary action groups to help implement some of this work / be that one point of contact for the universities and the Sheffield city region
- How do we get funders/departmental support for communications-based research that aims for long term impact?
- Sheffield Sharing Network
- Would like to see more creative evaluation methods other than forms
- Developing creative outcome measures that are meaningful to VCS/users
- Involve service users - content, method, interpret
- Qualitative vs Quantitative?

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commissioning processes -&gt; need to facilitate innovation and engagement</li></ul> |
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## Workshop One

### Points from facilitators

- Most health research goes into “hard science” (90%)
- “Implementation science” is 5%
- “Public Health” is 4%
- “Community research” is just 1%
- Have to fight to get community in as researchers
- Worries about career paths for research staff if they go into community research
- Time to develop relationships is key
- Community/Academic partnerships are EFFECTIVE
- Co-design of evaluation/research is more valid – higher recruitment, lower dropout
- Unsuccessful relationships come from flirting with the unis
- Successful relationships came about when they went for Big Lottery Fund grants and in this process built great relationships with the university
- Absolutely transformative to work with Hallam and SchARR
- Used a SchARR module to learn
- Give out free modules to voluntary sector to upskill
- It works when you have a clear idea, time, and money
- Generate ideas on what you would like to research

### Questions

1. How do we commission services where the evidence base is limited?
- 2. Develop a shared communication / language**
3. What does each side want from each other?
4. How do we research youth violence?
5. How do we re-generate funding to build capacity?
- 6. The impact of the last 8 years of austerity**
- 7. To have a central portal for community groups to access research**
8. How can commissioners join in on the conversation?
- 9. What would make it easier for mutual benefit?**

## 2) Develop a shared communication / language

- Constantly ask people to join research groups, needs funding
- Tackling a whole lot of issues
- The formal methods in place are anti-community
- Needs a real commitment of time
- Even if funding does not come off you're building relationships
- Too many acronyms

## 6) The impact of the last 8 years of austerity

- Self-care and self-management are increasing
- Things are getting more difficult
- Social leaders
- An index that is not based on GDP instead quality of life
- Vast amounts of cuts
- Cost of cutting back on services is devastating
- The impact is evidenced, how do we show it is necessary?
- The delayed impact is often missed
- Negative impacts are often long-term

## 7) To have a central portal for community groups to access researchers

- Matchmaking for research
- Mapping
- Which academics are interested?
- Communication from university
- There needs to be a presence that is not defined by the university funding programme

## 9) What would make it easier for mutual benefit?

- A way into both sectors
- A system to match people
- The community should guide where the research goes
- The uni should be able to give technical assistance
- Need to know how to draw in funding
- They might be interested but because of the lack of funding they do something else
- Community doesn't necessarily know who to go to

## **Workshop Two**

Lots of ideas including:

- Funding – how to access
- Communication and engagement
- How to create impact from research; implementation, mobilisation, knowledge
- Thinking about how to develop a more generic model for research; the broader principles and themes will be essentially the same – it will be the intervention that is more specific to each organisation/research question
- How can research help the VS demonstrate the knowledge/power it has to bring to research
  - Some examples provided – hard to reach groups/the breadth and range of some voluntary sector organisations in terms of reach
  - Some thoughts that Universities must become better at the ‘narrative’, make it clear what they do, how they can increase understanding and knowledge. Work to break down barriers and demystify what they do
- How to engage the community sector at early stages in the research process – the university must bring together the knowledge and experience that the CVS for true co-production.
- PPI mentioned – the growing importance of PPI with regards to funding applications – Lip service no longer acceptable and PPI has to be demonstrated
- Challenges of identifying and funding a single/simple health intervention out of myriad of multiple needs – single intervention can be difficult to define but essential for research applications
- How to evaluate holistic interventions – need addressing
  - Difficult
  - Potentially undeveloped methods issue
  - For some funding applications the methodology might be criticised as being weak/too vague
- Should there be a rethink about how we (funding bodies/academia) think about research
  - Is the medical ‘lens’ becoming less applicable/appropriate to solve 21 Century health problems, for example around mental health – what role can the CVS play

This led to small group discussions around

- Funding
- Public Mental Health Research
- Methods for evaluating complex interventions

These were summarised at the end

### **Funding and role of CVS**

- There must be a recognition of the expertise the VS brings to the table, and there is a need to develop stronger relationships.
- Forums – can bring people from all sectors together, to increase understanding of what each partner can bring to the relationship

- VS a powerful resource, for example around policy challenges; VS is well placed to show innovation around how these challenges can be met

### **Public Mental Health Research**

- Mental Health Illness – socially determined and strength of VS is bringing people together from different backgrounds
- Focus on engagement, and different research methodologies which might be more appropriate for community research, for example, Action Research
- Felt this is real engagement, a more holistic approach.
- Thinking about the benefits of taking a multi-disciplinary approach, for example, can the arts, such as medical humanities method bring something to the table in terms of measuring impact/benefit of an intervention on the community.

Janet mentioned that mental health research is currently an NIHR priority, and they welcome mental health research that is a novel design/community based so the time is right to take this forward.

### **Methods for evaluating complex interventions**

- The needs to be a move/shift to methods that are more complexity sensitive but problematic
- Quality is difficult to judge
- Lack of evidence as papers are less likely to be published
- Some recognition that NIHR/HSDR are becoming more open to co-production, realist evaluations.
- Suggestion that a multi-disciplinary funding team to be put together, including people from different methodological backgrounds and expertise, and mobilised to respond to calls for applications for funding.

Match upstream – matching the team with the specific funding calls, which are often known sometime in advance therefore starting the application process in good time, with expertise from both academia and CVS.