Researching Together conference

1 February 2018

Round table workshop notes

Workshop title: *Research 'by' the community: what can we learn from community-led action research?*

Facilitated by Andrew Paterson, Scottish Community Development Centre and Diane Kennedy, Evaluation Support Scotland

The round table introduced community-led action research as a way of doing research where the community being researched decides the issue to be researched, how the research is carried out and how the research results are used.

Participants explored the following:

- How do we recognise the voice of the community being researched?
- How does community-led action research relate to other forms of research involving the third sector, communities and service users?
- Power relations within research more generally.
- How best to share learning between people and groups doing their own research.

Notes:

Table 1:

- Identify gaps and voices not heard – to get beyond the usual suspects
- Encourage community 'activists to engage and include views of other community members ('seldom heard')
- Story sharing!
- Grow your own network – "seldom heard"
- Regulative and legislative actions for engagement
- "Peer" participatory officers
- Participatory "officers" and posts who can help open up systems
- Live experience stories
- People who share lived experience stories having control over how stories are used to effect change.

Table 2:

- Who is the "audience"?
- Overview – open events, not subject-led (cluster and identify)
- East Lothian Council
  - Community consultation exercise whole county

- Good practice: MRC research on autism has had a very strong community voice
- Who?
  - Community council
  - Councillor
  - Council staff
  - Community centres
- How?
  - Is there a directory or map of community groups?
  - Asset map
  - Is there an online network via social media, e.g. "heart of X" or Voice of X.
- Community organisations do not always represent the community, e.g. community planning partnerships
- Basics – asking the community what should be researched in the first place
- EmPOWERment really requires genuine letting go of existing power structures, giving it down to community organisations
- Impact and follow through in community-led research very important as, if ignored, then difficult to build trust and create change.
- Danger of researchers wandering around with "solutions" to their questions!
- Directory/mapping of community groups
  - Online groups
  - TSI
  - Libraries
  - Community centres
- Mapping the community – GPs can help identify entry points and contacts for community organisations
- Reources
  - Accessible space
  - Comfortable
  - Private (enough)
- Flexibility to change focus as voices are heard
- Look at the way funding works. Is there scope for more flexibility?
- Who to go to
  - Libriaries
  - Communityu Centres
  - Voluntary Sector
  - H&SC
  - TSI
  - Language use is important
- We use big ears!
- Simple tools for organising meetings
- Researchers must get down and dirty with community organisation

- Tools like participatory budgeting cannot be done on the cheap and need staff support
- Building capacity in community-led organisations – a legacy to create resilient bodies not reliant on individual effort, structured to survice

Table 3:

- Who?
  - Networks such as Gramnet, specific with groups
  - People with lived experience running the project
- Resources/support
  - Training
  - Capacity building
  - Skills, data capture
  - Funded
- Support through training to empower volunteers from communities
- Researchers using established networks to target volunteers
- Community action research can have different starting points – doesn't need to be 'pure'.
- Opening up opportunities to people who haven't had them before
- Making sure people who are not usually heard have a voice
- Values/ethos more important than defining type of research
- Unintended consequences – benefits to individualist "community"
- Approach moving beyond "usual suspects"
- Adequate support and resources for training
- Outputs: "creating a new community".
- Ethnography and use of skills to pull out information without affecting outcome
- Need to ensure the community are heard using appropriate methods
- Using professional knowledge and expertise to empower train communities to lead on projects
- There should be the ability/process to reflect on the research process.
- Learning – what the volunteers get fuels future work
- Should analyse data ongoing and support research om the direction it is going
- Resources
  - Expertise
  - Ethnographer
  - Research experiences
  - Opportunity to upskills
  - Knowledge of the groups being contacted

Resources mentioned in workshop

Action Research in the Community (ARC)

ARC was developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) to help community and voluntary groups carry out research in and with their communities. The guide is based on SCDC's experience of developing and delivering previous community-led action research programmes. It goes through each stage of the community-led action research process and provides a range of examples and templates.

You can download the ARC guide here http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/ActionResearch/ARC%20Resource%20Web%20Version%20final.pdf

Community-led Action Planning Toolkit

SCDC developed this toolkit for Argyll & Bute Council, to support local community organisations to carry out community-led action planning with their wider communities. There are sections, fact-sheets and templates on conducting research within your community as well as other aspects of community-led action planning.

https://www.communitytoolkit.net/finding-out/

Communities Channel Scotland

This website aims to support community organisations to achieve their aims by profiling their work and linking to useful resources. It includes a section of further resources relating to conducting research with your community http://www.communityscot.org.uk/resources/know-your-community/

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act

SCDC provides a brief intro to the Act as well as links further information on the different parts. http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/community-empowerment-scotland-act/