

## Let's collaborate



**Inspiring** is the word that comes to mind when I look back on my experience of attending [The Third Sectors Research Forum's](#) (TSRF) second event '[Let's collaborate](#)' on 11 September 2015 at Victoria Quay, Edinburgh. Having been at the first event last year 'Meeting with academics' I could see how discussions on that occasion have moved on for the Forum and also for third sector organisations and academics.

Starting with a speed dating session to get to know others in the room and their ideas for collaboration created a real buzz of conversation and expectation. This was followed by presentations by Patty Lozano-Casal (Evaluation Support Scotland) who talked about the TSRF's latest publication '[Collaborating with academics](#)' which she was asking people to respond to a [consultation by 2<sup>nd</sup> October](#), and Tara Murphy (Carnegie UK Trust) talking about InterAction, a piece of research currently being conducted in collaboration with the University of Newcastle about how the third sector and academia work together to influence policy and practice. Tara flagged up that this research will be reporting soon - so keep an eye out for it.

Then it was time for coffee and chatting to others. There was a real mix of people from all sorts of third sector organisations, and academics. I chatted to people who were already collaborating with academics but also

with those who this event was aptly timed as they were just setting up a collaboration.



I really enjoyed the roundtable sessions\* where we got to hear about real third sector and academic collaborations. At my table were [Dr. Ada Garcia](#) (University of Glasgow) and Ian Shankland ([Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership](#)) who spoke with honesty and enthusiasm about their

collaboration involving Masters nutrition students working in nurseries across Lanarkshire and conducting a variety of evaluation and research projects in collaboration with Lanarkshire Food and Health Partnership. Their collaboration has lasted 9 years and had benefitted both parties hugely. When asked what does collaboration bring? They answered: “skills, capacity and innovation”. Ian thought that the evidence gained was more highly valued by others (in his opinion) and that the University ‘badge’ gave credibility. Ada thought this was two way as for the university it gave their research grounding in the real world and their students the chance to work in real situations, putting theory into practice.

They had not experienced many barriers and had easily overcome them but Ada was adamant that you shouldn’t let barriers get in the way, “You should just do it [collaborate]”.



The next presentation was from [What Works Scotland](#) and University of Edinburgh. [Dr. Sarah Morton](#) introduced a great [infographic](#): ‘*Manifesto for partnership research between academic and other organisations*’, hot off the press from [Centre for Research for Families and Relationships](#). Sarah’s colleague [Dr.](#)

[Hayley Bennett](#), Research Associate for What Works Scotland, talked about Collaborative Action Research, a model of research that is being tried in 4 community planning areas: Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire, Fife and Aberdeenshire. This work is still in phase 1 – the exploration phase. It will be interesting to hear, in the future, the results from the practitioners’ research and see the evidence to what works and why?

A tasty lunch and more chatting was followed by splitting up into one of three breakout sessions:

- Volunteering: its impact for people with complex needs
- Third sector compass to partnership: what research tells us good partnership is in practice
- Developing the use of administrative data on Scotland's civil society.

I went along to the big data session and, if I am honest, I was a bit bamboozled by some of the technical talk about open surveys. However, there were some very knowledgeable people in the room who shared their experiences and knowledge. It's great to have made some connections to follow up.

To sum up I had a really productive day, met lots of people, heard lots of examples of collaboration and got many tips for effective collaboration. I can't wait to the next Research Forum meeting... I'm ready for 'round 3'!

Feedback from others who were asked if they had learned what they wanted to learn from the event:

*"It was great to know the barriers that 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations face when collaborating with academics."*

*"Yes, a good opportunity to firm out more on what collaborative work is happening in Scotland."*

*"Very much and breakout session on volunteering and complex needs was vastly thought provoking."*

*"A very useful event to meet a range of people looking for collaborations."*

\*Roundtables:

**Roundtable 1:** *How brokers can help* – Shelley Beckeridge (Interface)

- **Roundtable 2:** *Joint research on children and families* – Clare Cook (Healthy Valleys); David Wallace and Annette Coburn (University of West Scotland)
- **Roundtable 3:** *Joint research on food and health* – Ada García (University of Glasgow) and Ian Shanklands (Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership)
- **Roundtable 4:** *Co-producing and sharing knowledge across sectors* – Nicola Allan (Scottish Universities Insight Institute at Strathclyde University)
- **Roundtable 5:** *Joint research/ training on prevention* - Heather McVeigh (Mentor UK)
- **Roundtable 6:** *Joint research on youth work* - Crawford Bell (YMCA Scotland)

- **Roundtable 7:** *Working group (joint research) on early years* - Larry Doi (Edinburgh University's Early Years, Adolescent and Young Adult working group)
- **Roundtable 8:** *Joint research on 'destitution' in the UK* - Claire Frew (Glasgow Homelessness Network) and Sarah Johnsen (Heriot-Watt University)