

Participatory Action Research

Guidance on building marginalised residents' power in local change- making

Supported by



TOYNBEE
HALL

Jan 2023

This guidance has been developed by Toynbee Hall.

About this guidance

We have designed this document to provide practical approaches to improving the participation of marginalised residents in local change-making.

The guidance is aimed primarily at local authorities, Community Safety Partnerships, housing associations and community organisations.

Our research highlights the exclusion of marginalised groups from local decision-making processes, and the need to build trust with these groups, as well as improve the transparency and accessibility of these processes for their voices to be meaningfully included¹. But we also know from the many requests we receive to share our approach that some organisations lack the tools and confidence to undertake this work.

We have therefore developed this guidance to offer ideas on how stakeholders can co-design more inclusive spaces, support residents to make decisions over project design, and facilitate ways for them to be better listened to by decision-makers.

This guide is based on learning from Participatory Action Research conducted between 2019 and 2022 by Toynbee Hall. Stakeholders interested in our co-production support services are invited to contact us (see section 6. Offer of Support).



About Toynbee Hall

Based in the East End of London since 1884, Toynbee Hall works with the local community and a wide range of partners to shape a fairer and happier future. We offer advice and support for local residents, and engage with communities to have a more meaningful say over the things that affect them and shape platforms for social change.

We act as an independent and highly respected partner, providing rigorous, well-managed and supported research and policy programmes. Working with partners and policy makers, we ensure that people affected by systemic issues are involved in designing effective and sustainable policy solutions.

www.toynbeehall.org.uk

Authors (in alphabetical order)

Bethan Mobey, Daniel He, Jed Michael, Oisin Sweeney, Dr. Xia Lin.

Key Takeaways

Process



Participation

It is highly achievable for institutions to adopt participatory approaches to share power more effectively.

From designing methodologies, conducting research, analysing findings, developing and implementing proposals, communities can have more of a say over the actions institutions take in a multitude of ways.



Equity

A Participatory Action Research approach can bring a diversity of experiences and ways of thinking to the research process.

This can lead to better engagement from a wider cross-section of the community with research. It can also improve data quality by reaching more marginalised communities and providing accessible ways for them to develop solutions.



Co-Design

All organisations can develop more inclusive initiatives by using co-design approaches.

Co-design can improve inclusion and impact by better identifying community priorities, making decisions with the community, and increasing understanding of what makes a project accessible, effective and impactful.



Impact

Co-designing with marginalised communities can have a doubly positive impact. Firstly, decisions and policies made by stakeholders are better informed and so are more effective in serving the whole community. Secondly, individuals are more confident to participate, have stronger trust in decision-making, and are more connected to their community and decision-makers. Together, using Participatory Action Research, we can build a more actively engaged society.

How can we help?

Checklist

- Better Reach**
Increasing quality and number of community responses from underrepresented groups
- Deeper Insight**
Understanding issues affecting residents least likely to respond to traditional engagement approaches
- Training**
Training residents to design and conduct research and develop solutions
- Better Decision-Making**
Developing inclusive and impactful models for connecting community insights to service provision and policy decisions
- Co-Design**
Co-designing and setting up inclusive initiatives at a neighbourhood level
- Tailored Approaches**
Helping to understand how to adapt the above approaches to a specific group of residents

Please contact research@toynbeehall.org.uk to discuss how we can support.



Contents

01 Introduction

02 About the Safer Neighbourhoods project

- 20 Process
 - 22 Evaluation
 - 28 Reflections from stakeholders
-

03 Approaches to local change-making

- 32 Approach 1: Building a diverse peer research team
- 36 Approach 2: Co-designing research methodology
- 40 Approach 3: Intergenerational co-design for a programme
- 44 Approach 4: Local decision making through a safety walk
- 48 Approach 5: Participatory budgeting

Introduction

About the Participatory Action Research approach

The PAR approach

Introduction

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is collaborative research, education and action which is oriented toward social change². It involves professional researchers and people with lived experience of an issue (community researchers/ peer researchers) working as equal partners.

From the very beginning of a PAR project, our peer researchers work to determine focus and methodology, collect data, and devise changes that would improve the situation of the community. What sets PAR apart from more traditional approaches is that research is done with rather than on experts by experience. Another aspect of PAR is to work with communities and stakeholders to implement solutions, so we do not conduct research for research's sake, and we use community insights to effect positive social change.

Toynbee Hall has been conducting Participatory Action Research since 2017, and we are currently working with over 240 peer researchers and experts by experience. Our peer research projects vary in size, ranging from three months' work reviewing Tower Hamlets Council's Tackling Poverty

strategy, to this three year research and social action project on community safety. We have strong experience in ensuring meaningful partnership working with communities and achieving meaningful impact.

An important aim and underlying principle of the PAR approach is to recognise and shift power relationships. This relates both to ways of working throughout the project and the impact of actions to come out of the work. This is often more explicit than in a traditional research project. Power is key in determining whose voices, values and ideas are expressed in decision-making that shapes people's lives. Too often, the limited perspectives or values of those who do have power lead to negative outcomes for those who have been excluded from the decision-making process.



Through PAR, the goal is to build or **shift power**, such that the perspectives of typically marginalised groups are included in decisions which shape their lives. This entails recognising and supporting positive expressions of power, such as: 'power with', the shared power that grows through collaboration; 'power to', the power to make a difference or create something new; and 'power within', which involves building people's capacities and confidence to be a part of change³.

We aim to develop the power of the people we work with and the communities they represent in a number of these ways, including: building collaborative decision-making into as many steps of a project as possible (power with); connecting them with decision-making processes and the resources to make or create new policies or projects (power to); and working with them to increase their confidence, skills and social capital (power within).



About the Safer Neighbourhoods project



This project took place in Tower Hamlets, which is the most deprived borough in London⁴. It was funded by Trust for London, and inspired by our previous community research⁵ which found that 1 out of every 3 Tower Hamlets residents over the age of 50 highlighted the need to increase community safety and connection.



Using a Participatory Action Research approach, this project aimed to:

- Address concerns around unsafe neighbourhoods; and
- Empower tenants to work with social landlords and relevant stakeholders to improve neighbourhood management policies.



For an overview of our research findings, please visit:
www.toynbeehall.org.uk/making-tower-hamlets-safer

About the Safer Neighbourhoods project

Approaches to local change-making:
Learning from Safer Neighbourhoods project

Peer research stage

Process

March 2019 – March 2020

Recruitment

Toynbee Hall recruited 28 peer researchers, aged 22 to 79. From a variety of ethnic backgrounds, they spoke 12 languages and dialects. For one in five peer researchers (19%), secondary school was their highest level of education, and most of the group (61%) had never been to University. Peer researchers were provided with monetary incentives for taking part.

Training and Developing Research

Toynbee Hall facilitated 18 peer research workshops to provide training and develop the project throughout the research phase. Peer researchers learned about research methodology while practicing a range of skills at each stage of the research process. Peer researchers were offered one-to-one support alongside group training.

Co-Designing and Conducting Research

Peer researchers and Toynbee Hall's staff members worked together to decide the research focus, select the research methods, design the research tools,

conduct research and analyse data. 220 surveys with qualitative and quantitative questions were conducted in Tower Hamlets through organised group field trips and peer researchers' own personal networks. Seven in-depth interviews were also conducted.

Steering Group Development

A steering group of 17 decision makers, influencers and experts, including local housing providers, police, local council, and East London universities, acted in an advisory role throughout the research development. Peer researchers also took part in steering group meetings.

In agreement with peer researchers, the project paused due to pivoting our focus to capture the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the peer researchers and their communities. <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/research/pandemic-stories/>

Action phase

February 2021 – July 2022

Identifying Focus for Action

A housing estate was selected to pilot a community safety initiative that would build on the findings and recommendations of the peer research. A peer researcher living on the estate recommended the site due to a number of unaddressed resident safety concerns and because there was no existing Tenants and Residents Association. Policy influencing at local, regional and national levels was also identified as within the scope of the action phase.

Initial Resident Engagement

Peer researchers conducted surveys on doorsteps or invited residents to return surveys using pre-paid envelopes. The survey aimed to measure local support for a pilot to take place on the estate and to begin building residents' involvement in the project. Engagement was attempted with 350 households, with most residents supportive of the proposal. A follow-up survey was posted on WhatsApp mutual aid groups to find out which activities residents of the estate thought would be best at connecting them with their neighbours.

Co-Designing and Delivering Pilot

Beginning with open conversations about how residents could feel safer and connected, residents gradually reached consensus on the design of the pilot. Over 10 weeks, a group of teenagers supported older women with computer skills for 45 minutes, with another 45 minutes of social activities or meetings with local decision-makers. More than 60 adults, 15 young people and 30 children living locally participated. A number of peer researchers took part in co-designing the pilot, facilitating discussions with residents, and supporting the delivery of the pilot.

Influencing

Throughout the action phase, peer researchers and residents influenced decision-makers in a variety of ways. This included presenting to the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Team, campaigning during the Tower Hamlets mayoral elections⁶ and organising a women's safety walk with the local council and police.

Peer researchers reported that their involvement in the project supported their personal and professional growth.

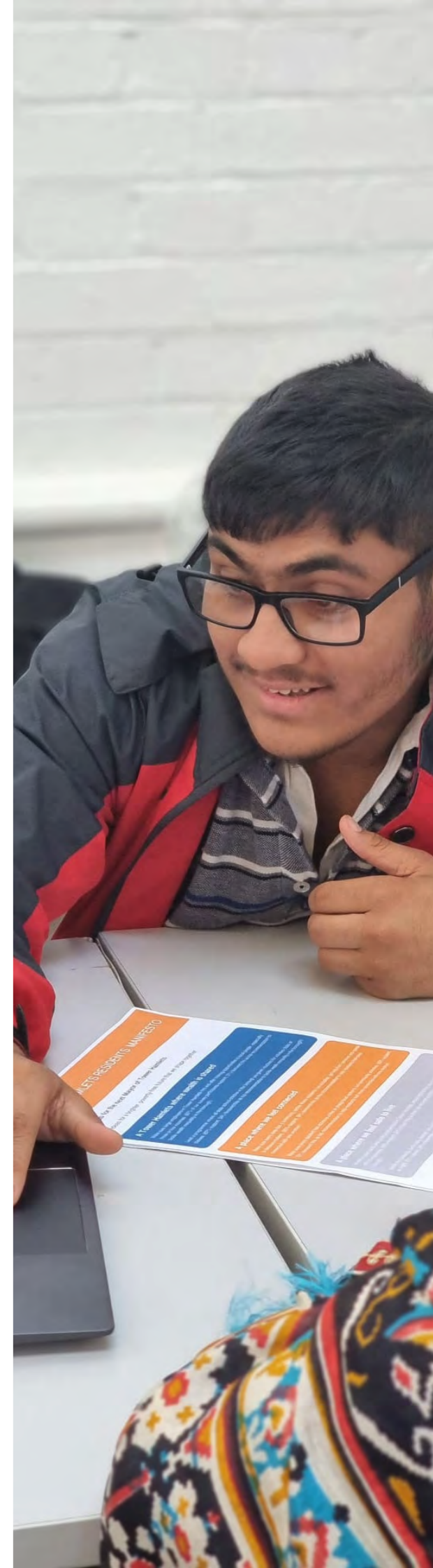
The peer researchers participated in a theory of change session facilitated by Toynbee Hall's Learning and Evaluation team. This allowed them to identify what change they wanted to see as a result of the project, and what would happen through the course of the project to achieve that change.

A number of peer researchers described feeling increased confidence to speak English in different settings that improved their everyday experience of living in the UK. Some parents reported feeling a sense of respect from their children as they met their commitments as peer researchers, especially those who had stopped working to raise their children. This improved self-esteem and they reported that the work experience helped them move back into employment.

Two peer researchers were employed by the project during the pilot stage. As a result of this experience, one moved into a management role for the first time in the UK following their employment at Toynbee Hall, and the other found work in her field after being out of the workforce for some years.

The project also led to a variety of personal victories. One peer researcher who struggled with reading expressed his surprise when he realised he had completed 12 surveys, saying "if you have a go, you'll be surprised at what you can do". Another reported feeling more confident to speak up for her friends' needs at the community centre she attended. She said the project gave her confidence to join a disability action group which became a central part of her life. Another peer researcher became a local activist, fulfilling his ambition to make change happen locally and nationally.

"I am really grateful for the opportunity to take part in the project. I have enjoyed meeting new people and the chance to practice my English. My confidence has really grown since taking part."



Evaluation

A small scale internal evaluation was completed to assess the pilot's success.

Around 20 participants completed surveys before and after the pilot took place, and the same number took part in post-project interviews. There is strong evidence of positive impact from this project, with three measures demonstrating a statistically significant change.



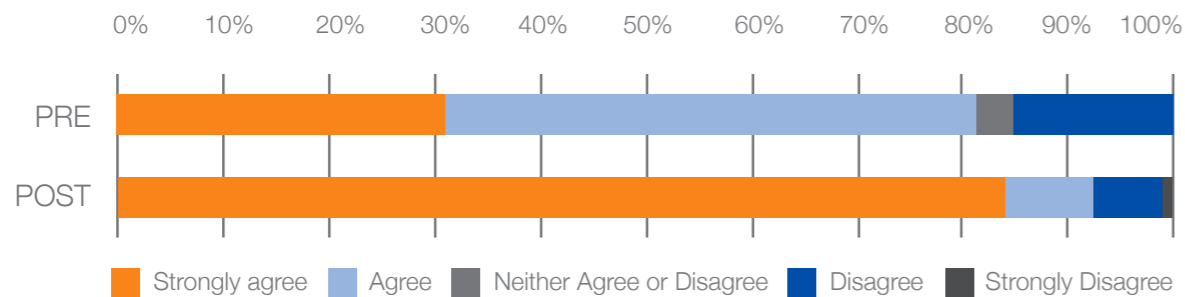
Evaluation

“I found it easy to attend and talk to people. This allowed us not to feel depressed sitting at home, rather coming and meeting new people.”

I have a voice in decisions made about my local area

The following measures showed significant improvement:

- When measuring participant's sense of voice in local decision-making, the average score pre survey was 4.0 (out of 5), and post survey was 4.32.
- When measuring how well participants felt they understood issues in their local area, the average score pre survey was 4.35, and post survey was 4.91.
- When measuring how safe participants felt in their local area, the average score pre survey was 3.9, and post survey was 4.17.



The survey data showed significant improvements in residents' sense of power over local decision-making, their understanding of local issues, and an increased sense of safety.

“I spoke to councillors for our area. Before I never knew who they were. I was able to open up to them and tell them about my concerns.”

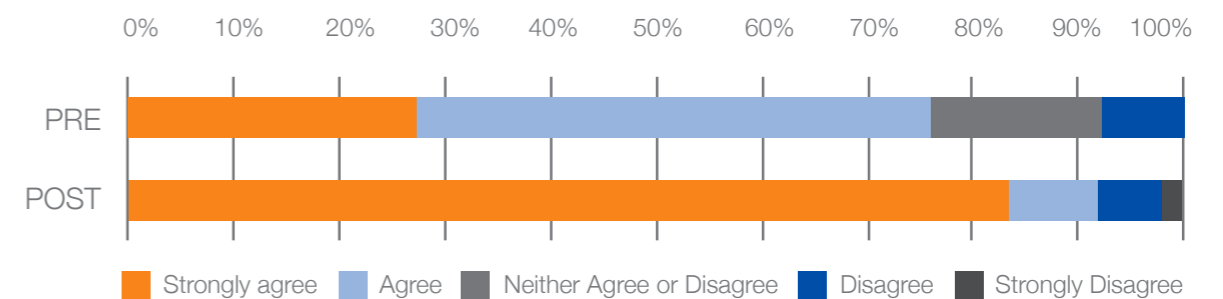
I feel safe in my local area

The short interviews highlighted new social connections, particularly new social connections with neighbours, as being important to participants.

These new friendships provided a sense of support and security. The interviews also demonstrated older residents' strong regard for young people who provided computer support. There was an overwhelmingly positive feeling towards the project and a strong desire for it to continue.

“The project was very important to me because I learnt about domestic violence. I now know information on what to do when families have problems. It was also important that councillors supported us with this.”

“Yes, I spoke to the police and I enjoyed it because everyone was friendly.”



This is reflected in the qualitative data.

Reflections from stakeholders

“My thanks to Toynbee Hall undertaking this important piece of research work which involved local residents. Involving local residents has enabled the project to achieve lived experience of those who know their neighbourhood better than others. Residents knowledge and experience will enable service providers to shape their services accordingly. I hope the Council, Police, Tower Hamlets Homes and other landlords in the area will take the findings seriously and work in partnership to making Bethnal Green East a safe place for all those who live, work, commute, run a business or study here”.

Cllr. Sirajul Islam,
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

“The Community Safety project on the Rogers Estate in Bethnal Green has been a great example of a resident led response to problems of crime and ASB in their local area. As a group of residents with no formal structures it would normally be difficult for the Safer Neighbourhood Panel to hear their concerns. The Panel tends to use established tenant and resident associations to contact people living in the area and take anecdotal views. This project has involved people who would not normally put themselves forward for meetings with the police and other authorities, but the clarity of the views expressed has been incredibly useful. I look forward to working with these residents in the future.”

- Sue Rossiter, Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel

“We welcome every opportunity to meet and engage with our residents and partners. Officers within our Safer Neighbourhood Operations, arrange and organise events and actions days in specific hot spot locations involving residents along with other key stakeholders to identify and tackle the common problem/concerns raised by the residents of the area. On this occasion, our officers partnered up with Toynbee hall to address the concerns raised by our female residents around the Globe Road area. The Globe Road Women’s safety walk gave us an opportunity to meet with our female residents from diverse backgrounds and allowed them to share with us and our partners the safety concerns they have in the area. We were able to identify environmental issues i.e. poor street lighting and improved them straight away. It also allowed residents to meet with each other and gave them an understanding that they are not facing these issues alone. As the Globe Road Women’s safety walk was a success and greatly appreciated by our residents, we plan to do many more safety walks for our female residents in affected wards across the borough.

- Moynul Ahmed, ASB & Community Safety Team Leader

“I think it was a very good project, a very successful project, we achieved a lot around engagement on safety issues and other local issues. I’m very proud to have been part of this project.”

Anwar Miah, Peer Researcher

Approaches

Approaches to local change-making: Learning
from the Safer Neighbourhoods project

Building a diverse peer research team

Approach

1

Overview

To deliver a successful PAR project, it is important that people with lived experience (peer researchers) and learned experience (staff team and stakeholders) work together to contribute our knowledge, experiences and skills. Peer researchers by definition are required to be directly affected by the issue being researched. This could be, for example, that they are directly affected by and are concerned about safety issues in Tower Hamlets. Recruiting peer researchers with a shared experience but diverse backgrounds can ensure that we reach a diverse group of participants for research and action, fully understand and interpret communities' issues, and develop solutions and push for changes that benefit everyone affected.

It's vital to allow sufficient time if you are doing PAR for the first time; it takes time to build trust with communities before they can commit to the project with a long-term engagement. Our first PAR project took 3 months to build a team of 20 peer researchers, but this gets easier as you develop a reputation, and build trust and connection with communities, even though you need to recruit new peer researchers for every project.

Peer researchers often do not have direct research experience. Encourage them to think about their own skills and experiences from all aspects of their life that they can bring in to use as researchers, but also provide sufficient opportunities for peer learning and support.

What went well

A diverse team led to a diverse sample: 29 peer researchers were recruited to form part of the team investigating neighbourhood safety issues. They formed a diverse group, aged 22 to 79, from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds including Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Latin American, Black African and Black Caribbean. Around half were either unemployed or retired. Having such a range of lived experience and language skills within the group helped us to reach a broadly representative sample of Tower Hamlets residents during the research phase. This proved vital in making the survey and interviews accessible to marginalised communities such as those with low English language literacy.

Challenges

Difficulty recruiting young people: It was challenging to recruit young people (18 – 24 years) to the project, and they were underrepresented in the peer research group. This may be because the framing of 'community safety' was less meaningful for them than for older adults.

Step-by-step guide

Building a diverse peer research team

01

Outreach

More than 20 organisations were contacted to recruit peer researchers and participants. These include local community organisations, libraries, GPs, education institutions, and organisations working with specific groups. Community members from Toynbee Hall's community centre were also recruited, some of whom had taken part in a previous peer research project.

02

Reviewing for Diversity

As recruitment progressed, the research facilitators periodically reviewed the peer research team to highlight any potential gaps in representation. Where identified, staff made efforts to reach any underrepresented demographic.

03

Team Building

With such a diverse team, building trust between the peer researchers and the staff team was a priority. Ground rules were agreed collectively. Facilitators agreed with peer researchers when and how power over decision-making was to be shared. Time was dedicated to facilitated discussion about personal experiences of safety issues, with peer researchers encouraged to reflect on their differences and commonalities. Facilitators also discussed the benefits of building our understanding of issues with multiple perspectives to encourage sharing.

04

Training

Two academically trained researchers from the Toynbee Hall's research and policy team provided research training for the peer researchers. The majority of the group did not have any pre-existing research skills. The staff members shared knowledge of research methodology, before collaborating with the peer researchers to develop the methodology for the project. The staff members also provided ongoing support on how to collect and interpret data, reflect on their role as a researcher, and meet ethical research standards.

Co-designing research methodology

Approach 2

Overview

Co-designing research methodology involves professional researchers working with peer researchers to identify research focus, design research methods, and develop research tools. Peer researchers help identify areas of focus that speak to the priorities of those affected, and have valuable insights into which methods will most successfully engage with their communities. Questions developed with peer researchers are likely to be phrased in ways that are easily understood by people with similar experiences to them.

It is worth noting that peer researchers can have one shared experience (e.g. being a housing association tenant), but diverse other experiences (e.g. disability, race, age etc) that affect their preferences for research methodology. Having a diverse peer research team and making decisions together can help reach a methodology that is as inclusive as possible. It is

important to be aware of power imbalances within peer research groups. For example, voting should not be the only tool used to reach a decision, as the needs of the minority can be hidden by a majority vote. Seeds of Change have useful guidance on how to reach consensus fairly⁷.

What went well

- **Inclusive research methods:** The tools were designed and tested for accessibility by a diverse team of peer researchers. This led to questions being asked in such a way that diverse local people connected with them and gave detailed, open responses. This enabled us to involve those who would be less likely to engage with traditional forms of research.

Challenges

- **Group size:** We preferred to have a larger group of peer researchers to support maximum diversity but this can be challenging. There was not always enough time to fully discuss how the group felt personally affected by particular issues. Talking honestly with peer researchers about how to best use the time available helped to ensure that relationships remained positive. It is important to consider the size of the group of peer researchers in recruitment, weighing the challenges against the advantages.
- **Reaching consensus:** Whilst the size of the group meant that diverse perspectives and views influenced the design of the research, it also meant that it took longer to reach consensus. At times, staff members needed to be disciplined about managing discussions.
- **Differences of opinion between professional and peer researchers:** The professional researchers proposed that interviews were used to explore issues and develop solutions before a survey was undertaken to test public support for the solutions. Peer researchers unanimously disagreed, voting to conduct surveys first. The group explained that they felt more ready to conduct surveys, and that doing this first would give them confidence to do interviews well. They also felt that they needed a better sense as to the key concerns of the community. Professional researchers reflected and recognised that there were both disadvantages and advantages of using each method as the first method, and together they decided to conduct surveys first and include qualitative questions in the survey.

Step-by-step guide

Co-designing research methodology

01

Choosing Research Focus

The group discussed the issues they faced around safety which were then grouped into six key themes. To ascertain which of these areas should be the priority focus for the project, we co-designed a short survey asking Tower Hamlets residents to rank the issues identified. 63% of residents selected tackling anti-social behaviour as their top priority and as a result the group decided to focus on this issue.

02

Developing Research Methods

Peer researchers were then introduced to a variety of different research methods that could be used to collect data, including qualitative, quantitative and creative methods. Methods were assessed using the following lenses agreed as a group: whether each method was suitable to answer our questions; what method we would each be best at; what method would produce convincing evidence; and whether we had the resources, space and time to use this method well. Through this assessment process, interviews and surveys were selected. The project team then made collective decisions on the order of these methods and sampling approach.

03

Developing Research Tools

Peer researchers were provided with training around survey design and interview design. After this training, the group collectively came up with a list of around 80 questions for the survey. Key questions were then prioritised. The peer researchers tested how long different versions of the survey would take to complete, before agreeing a finalised version of the survey. A similarly reflective process was used to design the interview guide.

Intergenerational co-design

Approach

3

Overview

Intergenerational co-design involves bringing different generations in a particular community together to design and shape a particular output (this could be a project, activity or policy, for example). By including different generations in the co-design of a programme, their unique experiences and voices are heard in the framing of an issue and its solutions. Intergenerational co-design can highlight tensions to be resolved and commonalities to build on, build trusting relationships with those from other age groups they might otherwise rarely interact with, and ensure that policies or projects work for people from a variety of age groups. In projects such as Safer Neighbourhoods where different generations have very different, and sometimes conflicting, experiences of the issue of focus, intergenerational co-design is essential to ensure power balance from the beginning of the project.

What went well

- **Strengthening social networks and intergenerational relationships:** Many residents reflected that what they enjoyed most about the pilot was getting to know their neighbours by sharing social time with them. In our evaluation, older residents also reported great pride and respect for the young people who provided computer support.
- **Increasing inclusion and opportunity for young people:** The group of young people who came had a space to spend time with each other once a week. After computer support they played sports together in the hall and enjoyed refreshments. Young people received vouchers for their contribution and to use this volunteering experience in job applications, showing one way in which projects like this can help build their own capacities and opportunities (building power within⁸).

- **A space for many generations to come together was developed:** Over the two hours, a range of activities took place in the hall. Some were intergenerational like computer support, others met a specific need like wellbeing and movement class for women, space for games for young people, and drawing tables for children.

Challenges

- **Reaching a diverse group:** The early co-design was primarily with Bangladeshi women. The intention of the project was not to reach only one marginalised group. This was not necessarily seen to be undesirable by the project team as there were no equivalent spaces for this group to build connections and community power in the neighbourhood. However, this did mean that young people taking part did not have the same opportunity to shape the pilot from the very beginning.

- **Young people's ideas for tackling safety were less present in co-design:** Advice from our youth team suggested trust needed to be built before conversations about safety took place between young and older residents that could potentially harm young people's self-esteem. This meant discussions focused more on increasing connection than tackling safety issues. With a longer time scale, residents could have gone on to develop intergenerational approaches that tackle safety issues more directly.

Step-by-step guide

Intergenerational co-design

01

Identifying Focus for Action

The discussion started with facilitators sharing the findings from the peer research. Given the intergenerational tensions highlighted in the research, residents chose to focus the pilot on computer support, with younger residents supporting older residents with IT. This was considered a way for the generations to connect better as well as create some opportunities for younger people to gain valuable experiences.

02

Engaging Young Residents

Young people were under-represented in the group, so residents invited young people in their families and wider social networks to a meeting to further co-design the pilot. Flyers aimed at young people were shared on local noticeboards, in local shops, schools, and places like the Buddhist Centre and a nearby boxing/martial arts club. Staff team supported on the recruitment. We offered participation vouchers to encourage attendance.

03

Reviewing Focus for Action

12 young people reviewed and developed the plan the older residents had put together. They were also reflected on the research findings and shared their perspectives. This was important as our research showed it was likely some older people would hold negative stereotypes about young people. As a result, residents designed a pilot where local teenagers provided older adults with IT support, alongside a variety of activities that met the needs of both groups. They were enthusiastic to help out in their community and to change older residents' perspectives of young people. They expanded the design of the pilot, sharing ideas of what would make it enjoyable and useful to them.

04

Co-Designing the Programme

Young people shared very different perspectives on community safety. However their main concern was in agreement with older residents' views, which was about a serious lack of work opportunities and other activities or spaces for young people in the borough. Both groups thought these factors contributed to young people becoming involved in crime. Although it was beyond the scope of the project to focus on employment issues, the project provided some activities for young people where six young people provided older residents with IT support and had some group activities alongside.

Participation in local decision making through a safety walk

Approach

4

Overview

Often the spaces available to speak to decision-makers are not designed to support a diverse range of residents to participate. This project used co-design as a tool to create opportunities that included marginalised residents. One approach to creating more inclusive forums to speak to decision-makers was the development of a women's safety walk. Safety walks conducted by the police are an increasingly common form of engagement with residents about local issues. However, they can be poorly attended by sections of the community due to limited publicity, lack of interpreters, mistrust of authorities, worry about attending alone or not being listened to. Co-designing a safety walk can lead to greater community ownership over the event, and can help attendees feel confident that they will be welcome, included and listened to.

What went well

- **Institutional stakeholders attended, listened and acted:** Some immediate changes took place, such as improved lighting and CCTV in problem areas. Other actions were assigned to a council officer with responsibility for actioning the issues.
- **Marginalised residents felt they had more of a say in local decision-making:** Our evaluation showed residents felt they had an increased voice in decision-making, with residents often citing the women's safety walk as an action where their collective voice resulted in changes. Safety stakeholders also commented that it was unusual for women who needed interpreters to attend safety walks, indicating this approach increased inclusion.
- **The Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel (SNWP) invited a representative from the group to join the panel:** The chair of the local SNWP group recognised that the

PAR group consisted of residents who do not usually attend traditional engagement forums. The group accepted her invitation to present at the next meeting and were invited to send a representative to the panel to share updates on their safety priorities.

- **Accompanying domestic violence workshop:** The council's Violence Against Women and Girls team offered to deliver a session with their Sylheti-speaking project worker to the group. After the session, the project worker recorded a voice note in Sylheti with numbers to call and what to expect when contacting different Tower Hamlets' services, which was forwarded to the project's WhatsApp group.

Challenges

- **The short term nature of the project limited strategic action:** Some of the bigger changes raised in the walk such as pedestrianisation of certain areas need a

long-term strategic approach to become reality and more cross-community support. This was not possible within the scope of the project.

- **Conflicting priorities:** From the peer research stage of the project, it was clear that groups from different demographics have different opinions of how to best tackle safety issues. The priorities of the Bangladeshi women involved in the walk will at times conflict with priorities or solutions favoured by other underrepresented groups like young Bangladeshi men. Our learning suggests that some groups may need spaces where their intersecting experiences of gender, ethnicity or age are shared to build power around safety issues. However, there also needs to be inclusive, cross-community opportunities to reach consensus on local change.

Step-by-step guide

Participation in local decision making through a safety walk

01

Responding to Emerging Needs

A women's safety walk was developed in response to the murder of a woman living on a local estate. Residents asked for support to respond to the incident on the project's WhatsApp group and in conversation with project facilitators. The project team reached out to a local councillor, who then curated a variety of support offers from the local council and police.

02

Prioritising Inclusion

The women followed a co-designed route to each location, including a poorly-lit and isolated underpass, roads next to a local school where knife crime was a worry, and a park where drugs were often used. Peer researchers supported interpretation and the facilitator made sure everyone understood what was said and had the opportunity to take part in the conversation. This was particularly important for slower-walking mothers with prams who could easily have been left out without deliberate efforts to include them.

03

Having a Say

At each of the locations, community members raised the issues causing them to feel unsafe, and they put forward their proposals for what could help. These included: better lighting, CCTV, more police patrols, crossing guards, pedestrianising certain problem roads and making space for socialisation and more activities for young people. These recommendations were given directly to the ASB officers, police and councillors who then created an action plan to tackle those issues.

Participatory budgeting

Approach

5

Overview

Participatory budgeting aims to involve the community you are working with in making budgeting decisions that reflect their priorities and needs. It helps create a sense of ownership over the project among community members. We apply this approach in our PAR work. In sharing decision-making over the project budget, we also drew out conversations around what resources the group were able to bring in themselves, as well as what connections they have locally that could help with the running of the project.

Sometimes this resulted in far less budget being allocated to an area than previously estimated. It was important to go into the session with a framework and some limitations around what was possible, based closely on what the community group had designed so far. This is in part to be transparent about what is possible with resources available. Furthermore, since we want to encourage critical engagement with any assumptions that staff members may have made, that framework was actually a useful tool for this, as well as orienting

discussions around concrete suggestions that made it easy for residents to visualise budgeting decisions and adapt them.

What went well

- **Creating inclusive spaces:** The majority of attendees would be unable to participate without interpretation support provided. While not ideal in terms of noise level, young parents could more easily attend as smaller discussions took place while children could run around, play games and draw.
- **Reaching consensus:** We reached a consensus on the budget between 45 residents of different ages, largely by facilitating between groups and each group taking the time to listen to and think through the other group's reasons for a budgeting recommendation or decision. There was some disagreement on what the budget should be spent on between the younger and older members of the community. Through compromises made by both groups, we were able to reach a budget which was agreed upon by all.

- **Uncovering community assets:** We discovered residents had a variety of skills and resources that they were happy to bring to the pilot. Residents put themselves forward for roles like setting up refreshments, while others offered to bring food and drink to the meetings, or their devices for IT support. Some residents offered to contact people from their networks who could help run the suggested activities.
- **Challenging professional assumptions:** There were areas where all demographics agreed professional assumptions overestimated the cost of what was needed. This was most notable on the food and drinks budget given what people wanted and what they were happy to contribute as a collective.

Challenges

- **Inclusion challenges:** Older participants may have found the noise level particularly challenging, and in future a quiet space might need to be set up for their discussions.
- **Balancing views and considering power dynamics:** Taking care not to lose the balance or sense of where the other groups were coming from when relaying their conversations was a challenge, especially with limited time. Young people could be viewed as less powerful in the setting, as there were less of them, and careful facilitation was needed to advocate for their needs to the whole.

Step-by-step guide

Participatory budgeting

01

Budget Planning

Staff members reviewed the areas of activity that were agreed as part of the co-design stage, for example computer support, and meetings with decision-makers. We estimated a budget for each area based on our research and assessment of likely costs and suggested minimum and maximum budgets for the project as a whole to be sustainable.

02

Prioritising Inclusion

Two professional facilitators and two peer researchers who we had trained in facilitation skills and who spoke Sylheti were assigned to the workshop. An incentive equal to the London Living Wage was advertised for residents for their contribution.

03

Creating Tools

Using Google's Data Studio, the project team created an interactive budget to be projected onto a screen. This was made to allow residents to see what proportion of funds were going to which area, and visually understand the overall budget as we took away or added to one area based on the conversations they were having.

04

Conditions for Discussion

In total 45 community members joined the budgeting meeting. There were young children running around, lots of noise, and different interpretation needs. Residents were more comfortable sharing their ideas if we split into smaller groups. We adapted our plans in response to the residents' needs and sub-divided into smaller groups. Some groups were made up of English speakers and others Sylheti, which allowed interpreters to facilitate whole conversations in Sylheti rather than switching back and forth.

05

Reaching Consensus

The facilitators went through the budget, area by area, discussing what people thought was needed, and how much they thought we should spend. Facilitators took the time to share feedback between groups, ensuring to reflect the range of perspectives shared, so that residents could understand and respond to differences in opinion, and amend their own positions accordingly. Several times this led to a group amending their position once they heard the reasons from other groups. This was particularly important as the groups were quite different ages, with young people mostly together in one group.

References

References

- 1 Toynbee Hall (2022). Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods: A Participatory Action Research Project. Available from : <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/research>. Accessed on 22 Aug 2022.
- 2 Kindon S, Pain R and Kesby M (2007) Participatory action research approaches and methods: connecting people, participation and place. Routledge.
- 3 VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V., 2002, A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation. Bourton on Dunsmore, Practical Action Publishing.
- 4 Trust for London (undated) London's poverty profile: Tower Hamlets. Available from : <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/tower-hamlets-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/>. Accessed on 12 Aug 2022.
- 5 Toynbee Hall (2018). Available from : <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/You-dont-really-know-people-till-you-talk-to-them-Older-Peoples-Participatory-Action-Research-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>. Accessed on 22 Aug 2022.
- 6 Toynbee Hall (2022). Available from : <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/residentsmanifesto>. Accessed on 22 Aug 2022.
- 7 Seeds of Change (undated). Available from : <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>. Accessed on 22 Aug 2022.
- 8 VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V., (2002), A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation. Bourton on Dunsmore, Practical Action Publishing.

The End



TOYNBEE
HALL