# Audio file

[Up for Yorkshire\_mixdown.mp3](https://yorksj-my.sharepoint.com/personal/j_brown3_yorksj_ac_uk/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/Up%20for%20Yorkshire_mixdown.mp3)

**Introduction paragraph:**

**Up for Yorkshire** is an infrastructure organisation based in Selby which aims to enable the local voluntary and community sector to grow and flourish.

**The Converge Evaluation and Research Team** is group of researchers at York St John University with lived experience of mental health challenges.

**This project addressed the question:** *How do we better listen to, capture and represent the voices of people with lived experience in order to have a meaningful impact on policy and the design of community services. How can we support those with lived experience to participate purposefully?*

**This podcast explores** how the project came to be; how developing strong relationships was a key success; how the project evolved from our initial plan; and our plans and ambitions for phase 2 having successfully gained follow-on funding.

# Transcript

**Amy**

Hello everyone, welcome to the Institute for Social Justice podcast. My name is Amy Skinner, and I am Associate Professor in Co-production in Mental Health Research in the ISJ. I'm here with my colleagues Bryony Boyle and Ruth Lambley. Would you like to introduce yourself Bryony?

**Bryony**

Thanks, Amy. Yes, I'm Bryony. I work for an organisation called Up for Yorkshire. We're a local support and development charity based in Selby. So, we have a whole range of deliveries supporting our local community really, covering themes such as well-being and employability, welfare benefit support, and we run a number of community spaces. But we're also a local infrastructure organisation. So, part of our remit is to support the wider voluntary and community sector across North Yorkshire.

**Amy**

Amazing. Thank you. And Ruth?

**Ruth**

Hi. I'm Ruth Lambley. I coordinate the Converge Evaluation and Research Team. So, I’ll just give a brief introduction about what Converge is. So, Converge is a creative learning community here at York St John, which offers university-based educational courses to adults in York with mental health challenges. Its foundational principles are that participants are students, not patients, and what is offered to them is education, not therapy. So, there's a variety of courses offered here at York St John: music, theatre, Creative writing, spirituality, and also research methods, which is where I come in. So, the Converge Evaluation and Research Team grew from a need to evaluate Converge courses. Since it began in 2017, CERT has become a formal York St John University Research group, which engages in participatory evaluations of community mental health-related projects across the country. CERT also conducts its own participatory-based academic research.

**Amy**

Thank you. So, we are here today to talk about our Community Research Grant project, which was a collaboration between Up for Yorkshire and York St John and CERT, and which explored lived experience work in Voluntary, Charity and Social Enterprise organisations, or VCSEs. We're going to spend some time talking about the project. How it started, how we built and sustained relationships during the project, and at the end we'll tell you a little bit about where the project is going next. Okay, so, to start us off then, Bryony, perhaps you could give us a little overview of the project to give anyone listening a sense of what we were doing and why.

**Bryony**

Yeah, of course. I guess in a snapshot this project has all been about understanding how we can better embed lived experience in the work that we do at Up for Yorkshire, and how we can support the wider voluntary community sector to listen to lived experience and incorporate it into our work in a purposeful and meaningful way. How can we support those voices that are less heard to have a voice, whether that's in local activities and projects or whether that's influencing policy and sort of strategic decision making. And hopefully we'll give you a sense during this podcast about kind of what we did. But it was a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with the Institute for Social Justice to understand what is already happening in terms of lived experience locally, regionally and nationally, see what we can understand from that good practice that's out there, and look at what that looks like in a local setting.

**Amy**

And lived experience can mean lots of different things, can't it? It can be experience of lots of different life situations, difficulties. And Up for Yorkshire covers a huge range of those.

**Bryony**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, like I said, our projects cover a really diverse spectrum of issues, really, and we tend to support some of the most vulnerable in our community. So whether that's supporting people with their physical or mental well-being or helping them to access employment or training or volunteering, or tackling financial and food insecurity. You know, the level of activity and support that we deliver has increased hugely since the pandemic and with the cost of living crisis. So you're right, the issues that we that we address are really diverse and lived experience is obviously equally diverse.

**Amy**

Yeah. And certainly for me, that's one of the most exciting things about the project and being involved in the project, seeing that scope of lived experience and how it means different things to different people.

So let's go back right to the beginning then, which is just over a year ago when you were first putting the project together. I wasn't here at the beginning of the project. That was before I started working at York St John, so perhaps you could tell me a little bit about, Bryony, why did you and why did Up for Yorkshire want to do the project?

**Bryony**

We work with lots and lots of people and we really strive to make sure that our projects and our activities and our work is people-led. Understanding individual challenges, needs, aspirations, motivations. They're key to all of our work. But we knew that we could do it better. Inevitably, you can tend to talk to the same people or work with the same organisations, and we knew that we had really strong relationships with the wider voluntary and community sector across Selby and our region. But we knew there was a better way, I guess, of capturing individual voices and doing that in a more structured and purposeful way. We'd been doing a lot of work with NAVCA, which is our national membership organisation, as part of the Local Infrastructure Quality Award Accreditation. So we've done a lot of kind of soul searching, I guess, and strategic review. And we knew there was a chance not only to do something better for our own organisation, but to strengthen our knowledge and our skills and confidence so that we could support the wider voluntary and community sector to embed lived experience better.

**Amy**

And what about you, Ruth? How did you get involved in the project? Why was it interesting to you?

**Ruth**

So the way the Community Research Grants work is that organisations like Up for Yorkshire go to the Institute for Social Justice with a proposal, and those proposals are then shared with the university to see if people are interested in that project. And when CERT saw the proposal for Up for Yorkshire, we were really excited. We felt they sort of shared our social justice ethos and the sort of passion that was reflected in their statement really excited us. So, we felt like it was a project that CERT could really engage in well.

**Amy**

And looking back at the start, what were the initial goals of the project? What were you hoping to achieve then? Has that changed at all as the project’s progressed?

**Ruth**

It has definitely evolved. So right at the beginning, the first conversations Bryony and I had were talking about the need to create an evidence base and recommendations for how Up for Yorkshire can design and support lived experience activities with the intention of creating a model that could be replicated across the wider VCSE sector. But this turned out to be a bit much for the few months that we had together. So we did end up with a research question, which we came up with together. So that was ‘how do we better listen to, capture, and represent the voices of people with lived experience in order to have a meaningful impact on policy in the design of community services and how can we support those with lived experience to participate purposefully?’.

**Bryony**

So we're nothing but ambitious! I mean, I think in that first cafe chat, we were going to sort of change the whole world and inevitably, it takes time, doesn't it? A lot of this work is about relationships and listening. But I think although it's evolved, we've really kept true to the drivers behind the research, and it's actually been lovely to kind of develop the project collaboratively as it's gone along.

**Amy**

And certainly coming into the project a bit later for me, there's something about that balance of having a really big ambition and a big idea and a big goal, and then focusing it down to do this piece of work here and now.

**Bryony**

Absolutely.

**Amy**

Which was really, really important to the project. And certainly right at the beginning, we spent a lot of time talking about, you know, if we can't do all of these hundreds of things we want to do, what are the one or two most important things that we can do? Because the Community Research Grants are 10 months long.

**Bryony**

Yes

**Amy**

And that gives us quite a focused period of time to work, I think.

When we've been talking about the project, one of the things that we've said a number of times is how good the relationships have been on this project. There are so many people involved in this project: there's Up for Yorkshire; there's yourself, Ruth, and also all the CERT researchers who've been involved, there have been a number of those who've been involved. There are the VCSEs, the people the VCSEs are working with who have the lived experience. So a huge number of different people involved, different stakeholders. Why do you think that those relationships have been so positive? Why do you think relationships have worked so well in this project?

**Bryony**

I think one of the things that makes the Community Research Grant process really special is because you are being matched in that first instance. Hopefully that means - and it certainly was in our instance - that you are matching organisations or groups of people with some shared values and shared ambitions. And I think that's been key to our relationship as a kind of, a partnership of organisations. I think in terms of how it's being delivered on the ground, partnership working is really at the heart of everything that Up for Yorkshire does, and I think that was really clear in in this process. I mean, like you say, Amy, we brought in through this collaboration, lots of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations operating in Selby, but also a lot of regional organisations. System partners that we work with, so North Yorkshire Council, Selby Town Primary Care Network, Integrated Care Board colleagues. You know, large organisations with a with a broad strategic remit. But as a community anchor organisation and a local infrastructure support organisation, we do a lot to try and foster those relationships across our delivery. So we convene an equity and advice network, for example, which has, you know, membership of sort of 40 plus organisations, we run a Community Health Forum alongside Selby Town PCN and North Yorkshire Council. We run an anti-poverty partnership. So, lots of networks convened with the purpose of sharing experiences, hopefully developing good practice, and setting the foundations for kind of closer collaboration. And I think it's through those networks that we managed to find the people and organisations who were particularly passionate about this research. But we weren't starting from scratch, and I think that's the key. You know, we already had good relationships with them, even if it was working in a different setting or on a different project. But there was trust there already and I guess trust that, yeah, we had some really clear ambitions and that we wanted to act on them. This was never going to be research that was going to sit in a folder on somebody's shelf, you know. I think we are an organisation that likes to get things done and we have been really fortunate to have an amazing group of organisations and individuals participate in the steering group and then all the sort of phases of research that you have facilitated.

**Amy**

Yeah. And certainly having those pre-existing relationships, I don't know if you'd agree Ruth, but I think that's been a huge benefit to us.

**Ruth**

Absolutely

**Amy**

Because there's no way that, as researchers, we could have come in and built those kind of relationships across that broad scope of the community in under 10 months. That trust has been essential in getting a steering group of people who are just so committed and interested and passionate about the project. Do you want to add anything, Ruth?

**Ruth**

I think it was a key achievement of the project, was the sort of establishment of the stakeholder group. I think that, as Bryony said, really enhanced the project and let us sort of have a running start as it were.

**Amy**

We've had engagement at a number of different levels on the project, I think. One of the things that we've talked about a lot is with co-production and co-production in research being such a nuanced thing that, there's not one way of doing co-production, and you tick all those boxes and it's a co-produced project. That there are hundreds of different ways that co-production can look. And what's interesting about this project is that there's the level of co-production between York St John and Up for Yorkshire. There's also the level of co-production with the VCSEs. We've also engaged with people who are members of and work for and are engaged with the VCSEs on a more day-to-day basis, rather than working for them. And having those different levels of engagement meant that as a project, we had to offer different ways in. So we ran- what have we run?

**Bryony**

Well, I think you're right. It was about creating different types of opportunities for people to engage. So if we sort of think back, you know, we had at the beginning quite a traditional sort of large stakeholder event, essentially. You know, where we talked about the research aims and sort of we did a lot of scene setting and I guess understanding where we're all starting from and what practice people are already involved in. And then Ruth you’d be better to describe it than me, but once we kind of got further through the research we had those smaller focus groups, didn't we? And actually that was a really good way to hear in smaller groups people’s individual and organisational perspectives on the research so far.

**Ruth**

So another one of the sort of key achievements of this first phase of the project was a comprehensive literature review, which looked at lived experience engagement across sort of all the evidence that we could find, academically and in the grey literature. And from that we sort of identified some different categories, like benefits to service users from working in this way; benefits for the organisations; barriers and things like that. And we took the headline findings from that literature review to two focus groups, which were invited participants from the stakeholders group, and essentially they sense checked our findings. So, we talked a lot about the different headlines that have come out and whether they agreed with them or not and how they saw the importance of the different elements. Which was a really interesting process and we had really, really good engagement from a whole variety of participants. And another crucial activity was a social imagination workshop, which sort of offered the participants the opportunity to view their VCSE activity or their council activity from a different perspective. And the feedback we got from that event was really brilliant, with many attendees telling us about how having attended that workshop will change their future practice. Which suggests to us the considerable potential for sort of a tangible future impact from this project with Up for Yorkshire for sort of the organisations they work with.

**Bryony**

Definitely and like you say, the feedback from that workshop was phenomenal. I think it was just, it was a breath of fresh air. A totally different way of facilitating an event. You know, we had a whole day really kind of exploring questions about how we do and how we can engage with people, and like you say, I think it made a lasting impact for a lot of the people that attended. Yeah, really good.

**Amy**

It was a really exciting day. Yeah.

**Ruth**

Another thing that sort of emerged that wasn't originally planned, but felt like something useful to do was a couple of questionnaires. So, a questionnaire that went out to Up for Yorkshire’s VCSEs and other partners that covered sort of different aspects of lived experience engagement. So, we began by asking them to write in a free text box what lived experience means to you. And then we asked them to rate how important they think lived experience is to their work. Then we asked them how good they think their organisation is at engaging lived experience. And what they do which works, what they've tried that didn't work. And we also asked them, importantly, whether they actually want support with their lived experience engagement and if they did want support, what they thought might be useful. And we also did a questionnaire for NAVCA, the national organisation that Bryony mentioned, that sort of covered similar ground, but in terms of organisational aspects rather than sort of immediate working with the public.

**Amy**

Yeah, as a result of that, we gathered a huge amount of data that we've been working through recently. And a huge amount of feedback and reflection on what was and wasn't useful, I think, for the VCSEs. Which has been really exciting because that's allowed the VCSEs kind of constantly to feedback on what the outcomes of the research might be, and to redirect the research, and to- I know certainly we had some ideas at the beginning about what the final outcome of the project might be and what kind of a resource we might want to produce. And we've kind of moved on a little bit from that thinking to, I don't know, some different ways of taking the project forward that have definitely been influenced by the comments that we heard in those different sessions and the responses on those questionnaires. So it's really been an opportunity for us to work co-productively with the VCSEs and to allow the VCSEs to direct and shape the research project as a whole.

So, before we move on and we talk a little bit about what we're doing next, what advice would either of you give to people who were working on co-produced research projects who are starting out to build new partnerships or are looking to build relationships?

**Bryony**

I probably sort of suggested it earlier, but I think for me it is definitely about those shared values and that early focus on understanding each other’s ambitions, motivations. Really kind of investing in that early phase relationship building essentially. Because I think particularly when you’re talking about co-production, you're really asking other people to trust you, trust you so you can hear what they have to say and to then represent it appropriately. So, I think trust in the organisations holding that, you know, trust between those organisations and shared understanding is absolutely crucial. And I think we've been really fortunate, you know, to have a really good working relationship, which I think has not only kind of brought us through this phase, but hopefully will mean that we can go on to bigger and better things.

**Amy**

Yeah. Ruth, do you want to add anything there?

**Ruth**

I think Bryony’s been very thorough! I mean, I really just think we were so lucky to work with Up for Yorkshire and their pre-existing relationships with such a broad range of interesting and enthusiastic and curious people who are were very keen on the project from the beginning.

**Bryony**

Yeah, I like that word. Curious. I think there has to be a curiosity to look at how you do things.

**Amy**

Yeah. And it reflects the organisations’ passion for lived experience work.

**Bryony**

Absolutely.

**Amy**

And the need for that work.

**Ruth**

It was interesting that in the very initial planning stages with Bryony, we were worried about the potential for a huge amount of data and sort of pressures on our time. So we wondered about restricting our work to mental health because that's what CERT’s expertise is. But as the sort of project evolved, that need didn't sort of emerge as something in the way that we were concerned about it before. So, we've actually been fortunate, and I'm really pleased it's worked out like that, that the stakeholder group represents sort of the full range of Up for Yorkshire’s partners rather than being very restricted to a small group of organisations

**Amy**

Yeah, definitely. I agree with that. I think it's been really, really important to have all those perspectives. And to understand, that helps us understand the nuance and the complexity of lived experience work, I think.

So. It's nearly the end of July, and at the end of July, phase one of the project finishes, so our Community Research Grant funding finishes at the end of July. But we are really excited because this week we found out that we've been awarded some follow-on funding from the Institute for Social Justice to continue the project. So, what's the follow-on funding to do? What are we doing now?

**Ruth**

So we're sort of turning back to one of the ideas we had right at the beginning, which was to have a pilot group to test out ideas. So, our proposal was really to set up two different groups. So, there'd be a lived experience group that would be openly advertised by Up for Yorkshire, so the participants would be drawn from the Selby community. And the group will essentially try and apply the learning that we had from phase one into VCSE activity. So, using these lived experience groups as sort of like consultants to the VCSE partners to advise on their lived experience practice. And we also plan to establish an evaluation and research group that will be drawn from Up for Yorkshire, members from CERT, and other interesting stakeholders, that will be trained in appropriate research methods by the Converge Evaluation and Research Team to allow them to design their own evaluation of the impact of the lived experience group.

**Amy**

Amazing!

**Bryony**

Yeah. We always wanted this research to have an impact on the way that we do things, and I think securing this follow-on funding is just fantastic as a way of actually trialling and developing what's come out of this first phase. We never had to convince anyone that doing lived experience engagement better was a good thing, but how can we make it easier and what does it mean in our local setting? It's very different, isn't it, kind of reading a report or some guidance. But we wanted to really find some practical application to take forward all the phenomenal feedback that we've had through the first phase. So hopefully, that's what this phase is going to.

**Ruth**

Yeah. One thing that a lot of the organisations told us in the questionnaire and in the focus groups was that they want resources to help them support lived experience in their individual VCSEs. So we hope that through our work with the two groups, we'll be able to come up with something that’s helpful but also hasn't already been done elsewhere because there is existing resources, so we'll have to make sure we're adding to it rather than just repeating it.

**Amy**

Yeah. And that thing about it being what we might call place-based, like rooted and located in Selby and in the experiences of organisations that are based in Selby, feels really important. And certainly some of the feedback we were getting in the focus groups was really about ‘the research is great, I'm sure that's true for some people, but it's not true for us here, now, trying to do this work’. So, setting up a second phase of the project that looks like what this means in practice, in action in Selby, feels really important.

**Bryony**

Definitely. And I think having the opportunity and the dedicated time to really understand the impact of the work both for organisations in terms of enhancing the quality and the relevance of our work, but also understanding the impact of engagement for those individuals giving their time and giving their expertise. Because it's a big ask to ask individuals to come and talk and share very often very personal experiences. So we want to be able to understand what that process looks like and how that process feels really to give other organisations confidence to do that in the future.

**Amy**

Yeah. And I mean, we were talking yesterday, weren't we, about what have we learned at the end of the project? What did we learn? What was the biggest thing we would want to tell people we'd learnt or we were trying to do through the project. And what it boiled down to really was that, like you say Bryony, it's not about convincing people to do lived experience work. Everyone knows that people's lived experience is important. But it's about identifying what makes that practice intimidating, reasons people don't do it, and then trying to remove those barriers.

**Bryony**

Absolutely. I think there can be a feeling sometimes that, if you can't do the gold-plated version, don't start. And actually yes, getting the principles right and understanding the boundaries and having that clarity of purpose is really important. But actually, if we can extrapolate that and like you say, make it accessible, hopefully we can remove some of those barriers so that lived experience engagement does seem less daunting, and whatever size organisation you are, you can find a way to build it in in a meaningful way to enhance the work that we all do.

**Amy**

That feels like a really good, clear point for us to finish. I think that sums up what we've been doing and what we're planning on doing next really, really clearly. So, thank you so much to anyone who's listening. If you'd like to know more, please do read our reports. They will be coming on the Institute for Social Justice website really soon, and they give an overview of what we've learned in the first phase of the project. If you're in Selby, and if you're involved with a VCSE, get in touch with Up for Yorkshire to learn more about the project and to generally connect with what Up for Yorkshire are doing, because they're doing amazing work. Also keep an eye on the ISJ website and on the ISJ blog to learn more about phase two of our project and what we do next. Thank you very much, Bryony and Ruth.

**Bryony**

Thank you, it’s been great talking to you both.

**Ruth**

Thank you.