

Each month we will issue a newsletter to let you know what has been done and any ongoing research. This month is a special update of the past year. If you wish to put any stories in the newsletter, please send your suggestions or articles to me at [s.duval@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.duval@reading.ac.uk) by the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month.



# WHITLEY RESEARCHERS NEWS



JUNE | 2020 | YEAR UPDATE SPECIAL



## INTRODUCTION

Sally and John inform everyone of the progress the Whitley Researchers have made over the past year and what they're looking forward to in the next year.



## BREAKING NEWS

Three of the Whitley Researchers, Liz, Sandra and Naomi, give us their perspectives on coping during this Coronavirus crisis.



## EVENTS

This year, we attended the Royal Geographical Society and the Big Local Conferences, here's our recap of the events and everything we learnt.



## RESEARCH UPDATES

We also attended the Uncover>Action Research Conference where we spoke about our research, as well as networking and being interviewed for Big Local. Sonia tells her story.



## FEATURE

This month we caught up with our 2017 student interns, Hayley Ryall and Bethany Brown, who told us what working with the Researchers meant to them and what they're up to now.



**FIND OUT MORE:** Want to find out more, or get in contact? You can email Sally ([s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk)) or John ([john\\_ord1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:john_ord1@hotmail.co.uk)) or find more info at [whitley-cda.org/](http://whitley-cda.org/) and [research.reading.ac.uk/community-based-research/](http://research.reading.ac.uk/community-based-research/)



## INTRODUCTION

As with many organisations, the last 12 months have brought us new opportunities for collaboration and championing community-led research, as well huge challenges and uncertainties. Since last summer, we've presented our research at national conferences and Westminster, written our first book chapter and engaged in research on a range of important issues: from young people's future lives and parent-school relationships, older residents' engagement with arts and culture, cycling, families' access to food, community gardens and the impacts of Covid19 on local communities. We've also had the pleasure of working with our fantastic undergraduate interns, Faith O'Rorke, Katie Ralph and Lizzie Sandeman who led our 'Ageing Well' research with the support of our dedicated University research assistants, Alice Mpofu-Coles, and Dr Lorna Zischka. With their help, we've continued steering the research and evaluation strand of the [Reading Place of Culture programme](#) and explored the opportunities and barriers facing cultural organisations and BAMER communities working with older residents in Reading, with a report launch planned for Autumn 2020. University of Reading students have played an important role within our collective since we started in 2013 and we hear from previous interns Bethany and Hayley in our new feature 'Where are they now?'

Our pioneering band of [Young Researchers](#), led by Paul Allen at JMA, have now moved into their formal examination years and have less time to engage in research projects. Nevertheless, they have not disappeared from the research scene and members are active in different settings such as the [RVA Youth Social Action team](#) and in supporting a new younger research group at JMA. With funding from [Study Higher](#) and the University of Reading, and continued support from the [Whitley for Real](#) partnership, we've expanded these activities to Reading Girls School and Cranbury College.

These developments reflect a Reading-wide diffusion of the exciting concept of young researchers – the RVA Youth Social Action team have now completed a [major research project](#) involving some 700 teenage residents in the town. A soon to be published report will have considerable impact on youth voice and provision in Reading. Our Study Higher work has involved engaging with several schools across Reading with an opportunity to enable students to undertake creative writing challenges and helped support young researcher approaches – for instance, in the Cranbury College pop-up bike repair plan – sadly postponed by coronavirus but ready to go as it eases.

[Food for Families](#) (a Reading-wide community garden project) provides another example of the spreading value of community based research – evident in reports including children's involvement in horticulture and several evaluation analyses. This research outreach is also evident in the links with Thames Water to secure the development of Fobney Lock on the Kennet and Avon Canal as an environmental and educational research centre linked to neighbouring communities, including Kennet Island and Whitley. What's noticeable about these developments is how they connect with and feed each other – a clear feature of





participatory action research is its capacity to build trusted relationships, networks and contacts. Study Higher recognise this and have commissioned us to prepare a toolkit to enable other schools and communities to develop young researcher projects.

Colleagues from Food and Nutritional Sciences at the University of Reading have engaged our community researchers to support an application seeking significant funds to transform our national food system; some of the preliminary work involved local research in Whitley looking at attitudes to food consumption and access. We are collaborating on this with our founding partner, [Whitley Community Development Association \(WCDA\)](#), who have expanded their food surplus scheme to deliver food parcels to 100s of elderly and vulnerable residents during the pandemic. On Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June, one of our brave community researchers, Aneta, raised over £300 for the project by getting a buzz-cut!

We do live in unprecedented times and there is no shortage of efforts to make sure that we record as best we can the experiences – of tragedy, resilience and triumph - that individuals, families and communities have been through during the pandemic. To this end we are attempting to collect the stories that we all have about how our lives have been so radically transformed. A few of our community researchers, Sandra, Liz and Naomi share some of their thoughts in this newsletter.

Another way is through photography and JMA and the young researchers are now considering how best to organize this vital record – with a focus on people living alone and families. The new young researchers have also expressed interest in a bike club and helping the Whitley Researchers in their planning to undertake a Whitley based project looking at promoting increased cycle use in the local community. It only seems right to make our world a safer and healthier place when so many have lost their livelihoods and so many lives lost.

As well as reflecting on the past year, we also want to say a huge thank you to all our research team, participants, funders and partners for their continued collaboration, solidarity and activism. Thanks also to Sonia and Bethany for producing this newsletter.

We hope you all stay safe and well.

Sally Lloyd-Evans and John Ord





## **BREAKING NEWS**

### ***Coronavirus Impact by Liz Ashcroft***

Life now that the virus has established itself has become very different!

The first week of Lockdown meant being in school for me providing for key worker children.

The week began with quite a few children but as the week went on the numbers dwindled. We were lucky enough to partake in a variety of activities such as cooking, art and PE as well as the Joe Wicks routine each morning.

Keeping up the social distancing was tricky at first, but we got used to it. I am not due into school for a while now.

From a personal point of view, I am alone at home which can be tough, but I am keeping busy with household chores sorting, tidying, gardening as many others are.

We have been really lucky with the fab weather.

I have had to get my head round face time/WhatsApp video calling, new for me but my daughter has forced me to do this!!

I miss school, the children, the routine and being occupied. The, situation has focussed many of us on the simpler things in life. Valuing and appreciating things in a whole new way. My love of music is keeping me sane!!!

Remember.... Apart but never Alone.



### ***Lessons from Coronavirus by Sandra Clare***

During the Coronavirus 19 pandemic I have rekindled my love of cooking and baking. I found challenges sourcing eggs and flour at first but was able to overcome these obstacles with a great deal of help from both friends and neighbours.

My neighbour next door who is a widower and 77 years young told me he has enjoyed our chats about food and the roast dinners I have made him. He mentioned how he hadn't had a Sunday roast in many years and home-made puddings such as crumble and rice pudding. With a chuckle in his voice he also said he had to move the buckle on his belt because he has gained a few pounds. We both laughed and shared memories of school dinners too.

Alongside this many residents in our area have been sent Wellbeing parcels including food, toiletries and even flowers which have enriched their day and made them feel humbled, from WCDA serving their local community. This is amazing!

We don't know where this will take us but for now, stay safe.

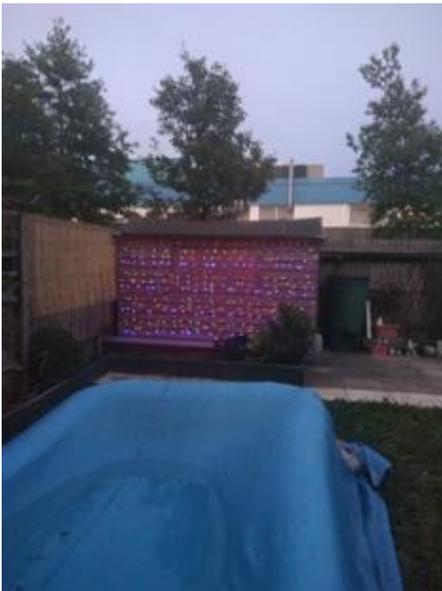




## ***Coronavirus impact article by Naomi Lee***

It's been a strange time put into isolation. I've had to be a parent, a carer, and also a teacher. Myself and my 11-year-old child have taken on new challenges with schooling from home, our routine has changed, and we have also taken up gardening and recently painted our shed, which my daughter found very therapeutic.

I am also caring for my mum; she can't get out to do her shopping so I have been doing it for her. We are all going through this, but we are dealing with it in our own way, as long as we stay strong, we can do this together.



## **EVENTS ATTENDED**

***Royal Geographical Society – August 2019 – Article by Liz Ashcroft***



## **OUR DAY OUT**

SO.... On Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August Sally, Sandra, Naomi and I headed up to London for the Royal Geographical Society Conference. The first shock of the day was that Sally told us to meet at Reading Station at 7.30am. Eeekk!!





We arrived at the conference in one piece and were delighted at the splendid building complete with marquee and several tea and coffee stations. The session that the Whitley Researchers were involved in was at 9am called "TIME AND AUSTERITY: Troubled Pasts/Hopeful Futures?"

We listened to some interesting talks from others. How they had carried out their research and their findings. Some had done their research in creative ways and produced results in creative ways, maps, leaflets and booklets. One of the speakers made a point of saying that when doing community research, we need to be careful not to patronise "who are we to declare hope on others".



THEN ... The Whitley Researcher Team knocked them dead.

Sandra, Sally and Naomi did themselves, and the WR, proud with an outstanding talk!! Everyone spoke brilliantly and confidently, and I cheered them on. WELL DONE YOU GUYS you were brilliant.

The rest of the day was superb. We listened to some great talks including a Study of Women and a mini tour of where and how historical artefacts are stored.

A great day out. Thanks, Sally for inviting us and the amazing opportunity. I am really grateful, and I know the others are too.

### ***Uncover>Action: Community Research that changes lives – Research Conference Tuesday 26th November 2019 – Article by Sonia Duval***

What a great event to attend, networking successful and as you can see from the Powerpoint (below), we did get our words out there. I think the most nerve-wracking thing I did during the day, apart from speaking, was to be [interviewed for Big Local](#). Whitley Researchers have definitely made an impact on any event we have attended. We are passionate about what we do, you ask Sally, sometimes emotions get the better of me and the people listening can see and know that what we do is for the good of our community and not just for self-importance. Since joining 6 years ago, Sally and John have been my constants in all of this work. They have brought out the best of me and I really thank them both for that. On the back of our presentation in November we were due to attend





a conference in Birmingham to speak about our work on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020 but unfortunately due to the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown, we were unable to attend.

Let's hope it will be rescheduled and that we will be able to let people know about our work. To view the powerpoint, click [here](#)



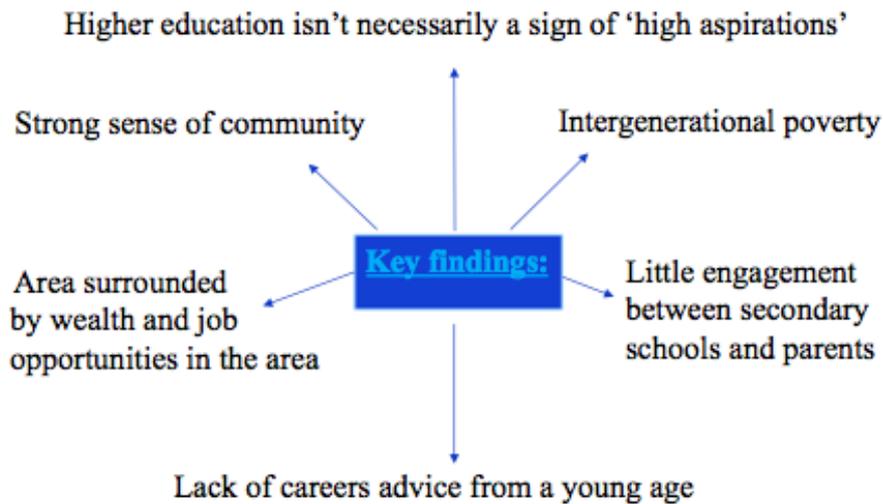
## FEATURE

### *Where are they now? Article by Hayley Ryall*

In 2017, I completed a project entitled 'Whitley Big Local and Participatory Action Research; Whitley for Real.' Throughout its duration, I worked closely with Sally Lloyd-Evans, Bethany Brown, The Whitley Researchers and Reading Borough Council, in order to research youth aspirations and increase their participation within the community.

Our main aims were to identify the key issues facing the community in Whitley, how they can be overcome, and what each stakeholder could bring to the project. Henceforth, Bethany and I completed research and interviews with key stakeholders, policy makers and partners to find out their opinion on my project, and how they thought people could make a difference in the community. We interviewed such a range of people: from Aspire 2, New Directions, Reading college, WEC and RBC. We scribed each interview, and condensed them into their main points and reflections to make policy recommendations and next steps. Our main findings can be seen in the figure below. We then constructed a report for these stakeholder interviews, which contributed to "Aspiration in Whitley: Improving the collaboration between schools, families and the community." This directly changed local policies in schools and the community.





We worked closely with schools and helped with the aspirations photography group. With the students, we designed a board game that could be played in schools, to assess their aspirations. We then used this in primary schools and took notes on the main things we found.

To compile the report, we first needed to complete a literature review to gain background information and explore previous research done in this area. So, I read articles and then organised the reviewed literature into key themes: Educational attainment, Home and Community surroundings, Standard of Development, General factors and Previous successful methods.

Ultimately, we created a list of recommendations: Increase careers advice; continue to involve the community; increase exposure to positive role models and celebrating small/all achievements to encourage progress and inspiration.

Lessons learned:

Interestingly, I learned that there is a strong sense of community and pride in Whitley. Coming from a small town in Cornwall, it was great to understand more about local communities that surround the University. This report gave me an especially unique opportunity to explore around the area, especially considering most students remain in the tightly restricted bubble of campus and university culture. Yes, I went from halls to a shared





house, living the university life as a student, but this enabled me to actually live alone for the summer while I collected my research. I developed myself and gained so much independence looking back. Academically, my report writing skills (which were poor/non-existent before) rocketed to a publishable level. I analysed interviews and data, wrote blogs, and learnt how to actually send professional emails and conduct myself around government workers and key stakeholders. I worked as part of a varied team from so many places and backgrounds, from the Council to the community, to people at the university, and got the opportunity to learn a diverse range of opinions.



## Impact and what I'm up to now

The project then inspired my dissertation, which was titled "Aspirational Youths: A social exploration into the influences on educational and career motivations in South Reading". In this project, I actually got a first - and I will carry that pride with me forever, knowing that I did something that was close to my heart and could actually make a difference. Indeed, if you would have told me a few years ago the extent to which I would enjoy my dissertation, I never would have believed it. Nor would I ever think that I could have received such a high mark. I guess it goes to show that, whatever you do, whatever you write, and whatever area you end up working in, it must be close to your heart, and you must enjoy it. I thrived on this project, and meeting the kids that inspired it was just such a pleasure.



During the time of writing my dissertation, Sally Lloyd-Evans put me in contact with a lady who organised university volunteers for schools. I volunteered at Bulmershe School as a classroom assistant, from which I collected the information I needed to complete my research. In-fact, from there, I continued to volunteer at that school in my third year, and then progressed to the Managerial Group of this scheme to encourage lots more volunteers to help in schools. I then remember thinking: you know what? I want to do something more to help these kids, so I knew I





needed to get more qualifications. This led to me applying for a PGCE through schools direct and was successful in gaining a place for teaching Geography. After I completed this, I was awarded with an 'Outstanding' for my teaching and got offered a job by my second placement: The Forest School.

The most ironic thing, however, is that I seem to have truly come full circle - I am now teaching Sonia's, a Whitley Researcher with whom I worked, son in GCSE Geography. Overall, though, I reflect on my entire journey with a pure gratefulness and appreciation for everything Sally, and the other Whitley researchers, did for me. I really would not be where I am without them.

In terms of my teaching, completing the UROP placement highlighted for me that I needed to create strong links between parents and secondary school kids. To this end, I have really tried to play an active part, initiating positive contact home via emails etc. It struck me that parents are mostly contacted with the negatives. As such, after every end of topic test or a series of positive lessons, I find it particularly rewarding to send an email or call to let the parents of the wonderful kids know just how much their child is thriving. It's also really important to me that I maintain close links with the careers advisor, and, having a year 9 tutor, we have done lots of work to do with apprenticeships to show that higher education isn't everything, and that there are an abundance of opportunities and routes they can take once they leave school.

Throughout all of this, though, I now never forget the students who are from families earning under the average pay. The one thing that reverberated the most for me in my project, and always will, is that students in this category are the most susceptible to be overlooked and it is that every child matters, and I refuse to let a single child be overlooked any longer.

### ***Being part of the Whitley Researcher community: Learning the true power of the people. Article by Bethany Brown***

Living in a bubble at university quickly becomes second nature and students can easily spend 3 years in a town or city without actually knowing the local community. However, over the summer of 2017, myself and Hayley Ryall were lucky enough to be selected to help Sally with the Whitley for Real project and we were welcomed into the local Whitley community with open arms. For a community that is nearly always looked upon negatively, we were astounded with how caring, open and warm the community was and it is their passion and determination that always comes to mind when I think of what a true community is.





Reflecting on my time working closely with the Researchers, I think many a lesson can be taken from the way their support for each other is unfaltering, to their hard work and perseverance no matter the obstacle. If I had to describe the Researchers in one word, although a very tricky task, I think it would be “empowering”. It is so refreshing to see that in the group everyone empowers each other, from the Researchers empowering the student interns to Sally continuously empowering the community to reach their goals; it truly a lovely group to be part of. It showed me (a quite a sheltered uni student) both the struggles a community could face, but also the power of a community, and how much of a force of change the WR can be - I definitely don't know any other groups that successfully lobbied the council for new bus routes!

Being a student intern on the Whitley for Real project really clarified what I want to be doing in the future: working in community development (in some capacity). I was lucky enough to get a job at Reading University Students' Union (RUSU) after graduating and have worked there now for just shy of two years as a Representation Impact Coordinator. Whilst not exactly in the industry I want to be in, I have enjoyed staying local and hearing updates from Sally about the Whitley Researchers. My role is still very much community based, working with student reps that form their own communities together, very much ensuring that all student voices are heard across campus and I am proud of the part I have played in developing this community and encouraging both their personal development and improving the student experience for their cohort at university.



I was surprised by the number of transferrable skills I gained being a student intern; transcribing interviews was great practice for gathering content for our monthly newsletter; working with such a diverse range of stakeholder equipped me with the skills needed to converse and work with various members of the UoR community, from students, to RUSU staff, to Deans of the University and finally the support of the WR gave me self-belief in my abilities - especially the confidence in speaking on stage. Without the placement, I definitely wouldn't be in the position I am now (I doubt I'd have even applied for the job in the first place!) and it has definitely encouraged me to think about those outside of my 'bubble' and made me think from a more inclusive perspective. It is easy to forget that, especially on a university campus, everyone comes from different

backgrounds and it's essential that all those students feel welcomed, supported and included; the very lesson I learnt working with secondary school students on the project. I enjoyed working with such a diverse range of people throughout the placement and the relevant communication skills have definitely proved useful at RUSU. Similar to the placement, it's really rewarding working with students and helping them with their aspirations and working towards their future.





Until now, I don't think I had ever considered how much of a difference the Whitley Researchers made to my experience at University and also to my life now. From encouraging me when the last thing I wanted to do was speak up in front of a crowd; providing me with the practical skills that have helped both my final year and my current job; to subliminally giving me the understanding of what the power of a community is capable of and how much can be achieved when power is given to the people. I feel honoured to be part of such an inspiring group and one thing's for sure... the power of the Whitley Researchers community (for both individuals and the rest of Whitley) should never be underestimated!

