

Brookside Safer Street: Community Participation and Evidencing Change

Research Report

Prof. Elaine Arnall and Dr Mahuya Kanjilal

November 2022

Contents

List of images	2
Acknowledgements	2
About the authors.....	2
About School of Society and Community	3
Introduction.....	4
Community Researchers' Involvement.....	5
Findings.....	6
Conclusion.....	8
References.....	9

List of Images:

Image 1. Safer Street Logo.....	3
Image 2. Brookside Central, Community Centre.....	4
Image 3. Brookside Ward	5

Acknowledgements:

This report is an outcome of a collaborative research project delivered alongside with local authority officials and community volunteers. We would like to thank Jas Bedesha (Service Delivery Manager, Safer Stronger Communities, Telford and Wrekin Council), Steve Poole (Community Support Worker, Telford and Wrekin Council) and Sean Brennan (Inspector, Safer Neighbourhood Team, West Mercia Police).

We would also like to thank Community researchers, who played active roles in this project. They are Adrian Watkin (Councillor), Tony Little (Brookside Big Local), Anne McCabe, Michaela Lewis, Kym Brown, Shana, Scott (Brookside Community Centre) and Nikki Lane.

Finally, would like to share our gratitude to all the Brookside participants who took part in the survey and shared their valuable experiences and views.

About the Authors:

Prof Elaine Arnull

Elaine Arnull is Professor of Social Work, Director, School of Society and Community and Associate Dean, University of Wolverhampton. She was appointed in 2021 to the ‘Advisory Panel on Probation Learning’ for the Ministry of Justice. She has led international scholars and senior professionals to present evidence at the United Nations 65th and 63rd Commission on the Status of Women. She is past Chair and Vice Chair of the American Society of Criminology, Division of Women and Crime, the largest professional group of feminist criminologists in the world. Between 2013-18 she was Academic Advisor to the Youth Justice Board. She is a past Global Scholar at the Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University, USA, 2016. Elaine is on the editorial Board of Feminist Criminology. She has led numerous funded research projects and is passionate about ensuring the voice of communities and individuals with lived experience comes through and is heard in research projects and impacts policy and practice.

Dr Mahuya Kanjilal is Postgraduate research tutor in the School of Society and Community at the University of Wolverhampton. She primarily is a social researcher specialising in community participatory research with minority ethnic communities in the UK. She brings back the research examples in classrooms to teach research methods. Her research interests

include social care issues related to ethnic minority communities, migration, domestic abuse, dementia, and community participation. She is an expert in using different research methods such as community action research, peer research, ethnography and mixed methods. She has delivered research for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and social service providers for the past 10 years. Mahuya often uses digital platforms to disseminate her research in accessible format such as videos and documentary films for those who do not engage with academic research reports.

About School of Society and Community:

The School of Society and Community is home to the Departments of Social Work and Social Care, Community Development, Youth Work, Housing and Social Care and Centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

Our teaching is informed by research and practice and led by academics who are experts in applied and theoretical areas of social work and social sciences. Alongside our formal teaching and learning programmes and research, we offer exciting and diverse opportunities for professionals within the public and social services to engage with us and the most up to date research and professional, practice debates. We are doing this through an expanding portfolio of Webinars, podcasts and a Talking Head Seminar Series.

Introduction:

Brookside Safer Street Project: Community Participation and Evidencing Change is a community research project. Together we explored the impact of the Safer Streets project in the Brookside area of Telford and Wrekin Council. The Home Office funded Safer Streets project aimed to reduce the volume of crime and improve community safety in Brookside. It was launched in November 2020 by the Telford and Wrekin Council with West Mercia Police. Measures included improvements to street lighting, CCTV installations and establishing a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Following the project crime data was examined to evidence a reduction in crime after the implementation of Safer Streets interventions. A Telford & Wrekin Council newsletter (11th February 2022) reported that overall crime rates had fallen, with violence and injury reduced significantly, robberies down by 54 percent and residential burglaries down by 42 percent.



Image 1: Safer Streets logo

The Community Participation and

Evidencing Change Research Project was initiated to explore how people in the community felt the Safer Streets project had impacted them. The aim was to understand more about how the community perceived both crime and the initiatives to tackle it. The project was led by Prof. Elaine Arnall working alongside Dr Mahuya Kanjilal and community researchers who were recruited and supported by Steve Poole, a Community Support Worker. All participants worked together to co-produce knowledge and promote a deeper understanding of Safer Streets impacts on the community.

The university research team adopted peer research methods for this project. Peer research is a form of participatory research where people with non-research experience play the role of researchers. Street volunteers are members of the Brookside community and volunteered to train as peer researchers and be involved in the project. Their active engagement as researchers in the research process and delivery enabled meaningful engagement and thereby better communication of the community experience and a deeper understanding of community perceptions. The project also formed an intervention in itself, as it was experienced as empowering by the street volunteers who became community researchers, developed new skills and took ownership of the longer-term objectives.

Ethics approval for this project was gained from Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing Ethics Committee, University of Wolverhampton.

Community researchers' involvement:

Six volunteers were engaged and recruited to become community researchers. The term 'Community Researcher' was suggested and adopted by them instead of the academic term 'Peer Researcher'. As part of the process, Community Researchers took part in a face-to-face training session to gain research knowledge. Led by Dr Mahuya Kanjilal, this training session included information on research design, ethical considerations, research skills such as asking interview question and recording data. This session was also used to shape and finalise survey questions. For example, the community researchers played an active part in drafting questions used in the survey, ensuring they would be understood by and relevant to, survey participants. During the training session the Community Researchers also decided the dates, time and venue for conducting the survey.

The survey of community views was undertaken by the Community Researchers on three different occasions. They interviewed 37 participants from the Brookside area and recorded their views on the survey forms. The Community Researchers were supported by Steve Poole and Dr Mahuya Kanjilal. What they found is discussed below.

The Community Researchers had no prior knowledge of research or data collection. They successfully completed the



Image 2: Brookside central

survey work and discussed with the university researchers their experience of working on this project as part of an evaluation session. All agreed their training and role as a Community Researcher helped them to understand what the research process is and how it can play a part in helping communities to have their say. They enjoyed their involvement in this survey and offered some insights into the challenges they faced taking on this work. They reported most of them had found recording responses in writing difficult because they felt a need to do it quite quickly. Based on their experience the Community Researchers recommended using multiple answer type questions in future community research projects.

Findings:

The survey conducted by the Community Researchers successfully captured community insights regarding the perceived effectiveness of Safer Streets project in Brookside. In total 37 local community participants responded to questions about the complex issues of crime and safety on Brookside. The majority of those who responded were middle aged (41-54) and unemployed.

89% of the respondents were residents of Brookside and 73% had heard about the Safer Streets project. Four key themes were identified from their responses: Improving Safety, the Reduction of Crime, Availability of Funding and Community Consultation. Below are some comments made by participants on each theme

Improving Safety of Brookside

“To make street safer”

“Improving safety of Brookside, Protect and make the street safe”

“It is an initiative of Police and Government to make Brookside safer”

Reduction of crime and the variety of methods used:

“Use different methods to reduce crime and ASB (Anti-social behaviour)”

“Police keeping down the crime”

“It is a crime prevention project through Police finance by the Police Crime Commissioner”

“Try and keeps criminal out of the area and providing protection for residents, making it safer for residents and helping police catch them”

Availability of Funding:

“From research by the Council and Police Brookside gained this funding pot to address criminal activity across Brookside”

“Money from the Home Office to impact Anti-Social behaviour.”

Community Consultation:

An area highlighted by respondents and generated by the research was Community Consultation. Respondents had valuable insights for future Safer Streets and other community based and funded improvement projects. These comments focussed on who was involved,



Image 3: Brookside Ward

how they were involved and at what stage they became involved. One person for example commented:

“Idea good but has not been worked with local community, poor consultation, could be COVID, too many people got involved, Parish council did not know about the project.”

Also, although the majority of respondents had good knowledge about the Safer Streets project there were mixed reactions recorded about how effective they had thought the project was. For example, 43% of the people were happy the way Safer Streets was delivered whilst 32% said Safer Streets had not improved any issues of crime and antisocial behaviour. This was despite the crime data suggesting that less crime had occurred. This was an important finding for the Council and Police and helps them to think about the planning of future interventions and about whether crime is impacted and reduced in absolute terms, alongside how that may appear to those living within a community. The main improvements noted by the respondents were the better lighting, installation of additional CCTV cameras and fencing. For participants who felt things had not improved, their concerns focussed on issues such as the use / sale of drugs on the streets and other crimes that occurred on the streets. Many noted a lack of facilities for teenagers and others did not feel they had seen an increased police presence which they would welcome. They also felt that some measures, such as the use of gates to limit access to certain areas, were ineffective, because the codes were widely shared.

Respondents were also asked about what they thought drove acquisitive crime in Brookside, an issue identified by police and the Council as relevant to this area. Respondents said they felt unsafe because teenagers were hanging around on the streets with young people riding scooters on the pavement. They witnessed drug activities around the area and felt that safety measure were ineffective, such as security doors. They also thought acquisitive crime was able to occur because not enough police were on foot around Brookside. The key themes they identified were drugs, unemployment, and a lack of facilities. Poor social cohesion and local authority neglect were also other reasons given. The majority (76%) said crime and antisocial behaviour were linked with vulnerable young people who experienced school exclusion, a lack of skills, employment opportunities and facilities. Respondents also identified gang behaviour in Brookside and linked this to problematic drug and alcohol use, ‘county lines’ and the night-time. Of the minority (41%) who felt safe on Brookside, they identified this was during the day:

‘During the day feel safe, feel unsafe during dark’.

Some of the improvements made in the Safer Streets project also played a role in increasing feelings of safety, with respondents saying:

‘Felt a lot more safer now because of the CCTV and improved lighting.’

And some also considered there had been a reduction in visible, problematic drug and alcohol use:

‘Felt unsafe walking around their local area, due to drug and alcohol problems on the estate. Feel a little more safer now.’

Almost half (46%) of those who responded to the survey expressed an interest in taking part in future similar projects. They emphasised that consultation with community members needed to be prioritised in future projects and shared some recommendations with the Community Researchers:

‘Proper Youth and community consultation before they even put the bid in.’

‘A longer time into the consultation with more of a community buy into the consultation by the community.’

‘More opportunities for kids, more police patrol, CCTVs...’

Conclusion:

This project showed that co-produced research was achievable and could be successful in a community considered to be experiencing economic and social dislocation and depression. Brookside has above average figures for the Borough with regards to unemployment, lack of access to a car, people aged 16 who do not have an educational qualification and ‘64.6% of households were deprived in at least one dimension’ (Census March 2011, Telford and Wrekin).

Nonetheless, when offered the opportunity members of Brookside community volunteered to work as Community Researchers and successfully engaged members of their community in reflecting on the Safer Streets project. The Community Researchers identified the benefits for themselves in engaging in the co-production work and the peer research process, which included feeling more engaged in their own community and increasing their own levels of confidence and skill set.

The research findings showed the real commitment that respondents had to improving their community and wanting a voice in how that might be achieved. Their feedback has been taken on board by Telford and Wrekin Council who have seen this co-production as a success and built community co-produced research into the foundations of their Safer Streets 4 bid. In the Councils view:

“The project has help us build on the great community spirit already in Brookside and has been supported by the extensive local effort that already exists.”

This is the first time a project like this has been used and figures show how a co-operative council approach, can deliver real results. It’s a huge success and we’re pleased to see the positive impact on people’s wellbeing’

Councillor Paul Watling, Cabinet Member for Stronger and Safer Communities.

References:

Telford and Wrekin Council (2013) Brookside 2011 Census Profile

Telford and Wrekin Council (2022) Newsletter Available from www.teford.gov.uk [accessed on 23rd August 2022]