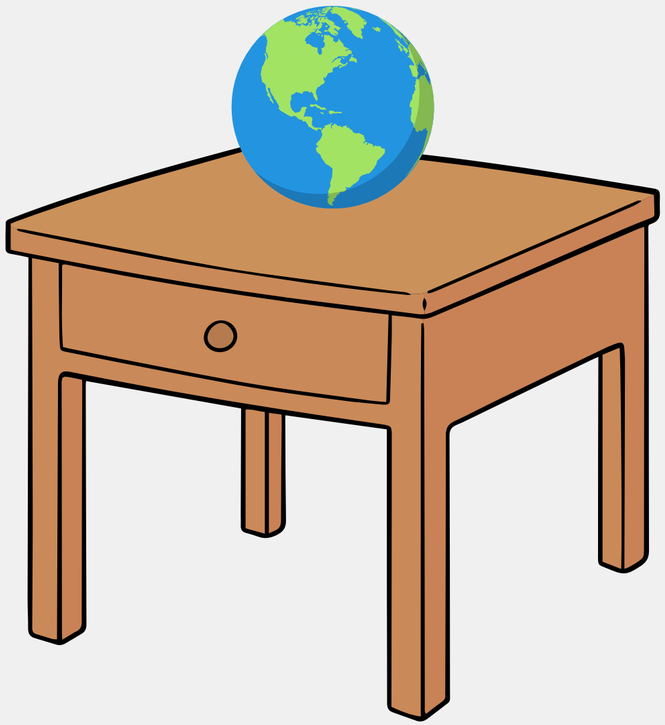
CAMERADOS LEARNING REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023



For Esme Fairbairn Foundation
compiled by the Association of Camerados
Camerados CIC Reg: 11634986



This is the story of a movement that started at a desk in a bedroom and is now in 5 countries and 200 neighbourhoods.

We've leant by doing, through years of mistakes and quick iteration, by listening and trying always to be maganimous, never precious or big about our own ideas.

This is why we've had learning partners every step of the way to stand beside movement members and challenge the thinking, never be complacent.

We hope this is useful to our funders, their grantees, to anyone engaged in community work. We've learnt about people, about how to create human and mutual spaces.

We don't think everywhere should be a camerados space, we just have this tiny idea that could be useful in every single neighbourhood on the planet. We don't want to break it by endlessly innovating. We just want to give it away to as many neighbourhoods as we can.

That's the help we need next. Just to stay small as an organisation but equipped to inspire, resource and connect communities into the future. Giving people connection and purpose, bringing them out of their isolation to come together and understand one another has never been more important.

Maff Potts.
From the same desk where it all started.


IS A PUBLIC LIVING ROOM.
ALL WELCOME COME ON IN!
Hello
CAMERADOS
THE ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEMS IS EACH OTHER
BE A CAMERADO
NO AGENDA
NO FIXING
JUST BE!
#WeAreCamerados

THIS YEAR WE MADE THIS 3 MINUTE ANIMATION TO EXPLAIN WHO WE ARE...

CLICK ON THE LINK HERE TO WATCH



CAMERADOS IT BRINGS PEOPLE IN, PEOPLE DON'T FEEL PREACHED AT

Sam C

I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER... AND THEY ALL CROWDED AROUND ME AND WERE REALLY SUPPORTIVE AND I NEEDED PEOPLE LIKE THIS IN MY LIFE. PAULA

#WEARECAMERADOS,

THE PUBLIC LIVING ROOM PEOPLE.

WE GET TOGETHER AND GET EACH OTHER THROUGH TOUGH TIMES.

NO AGENDA, NO FIXING, JUST ALONGSIDE OTHERS WITH A BREW, MAYBE A BOARD GAME AND DEFINITELY NO HEAD TILTING.



GET IN TOUCH AT

CUPPA@CAMERADOS.ORG

TO SET UP A PUBLIC LIVING ROOM IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

I HAVE NEVER MET MORE

AMAZING PEOPLE

THAN I HAVE AT CAMERADOS

Mymna

THINGS WE'RE GOING TO COVER



01 Some Numbers, some words

02 The Story of our project this year

03 How we involved people in our community

04 The difference we're making big and small

05 What we've learnt - what's worked and what hasn't

06 How we're changing what we do

07 Conclusion and the Future





Probably best to get yourself some tea & biscuits before proceeding.
We wanted this to be short and pithy but too much has been happening!
Hope we hold your interest!

01

Some Numbers, some words

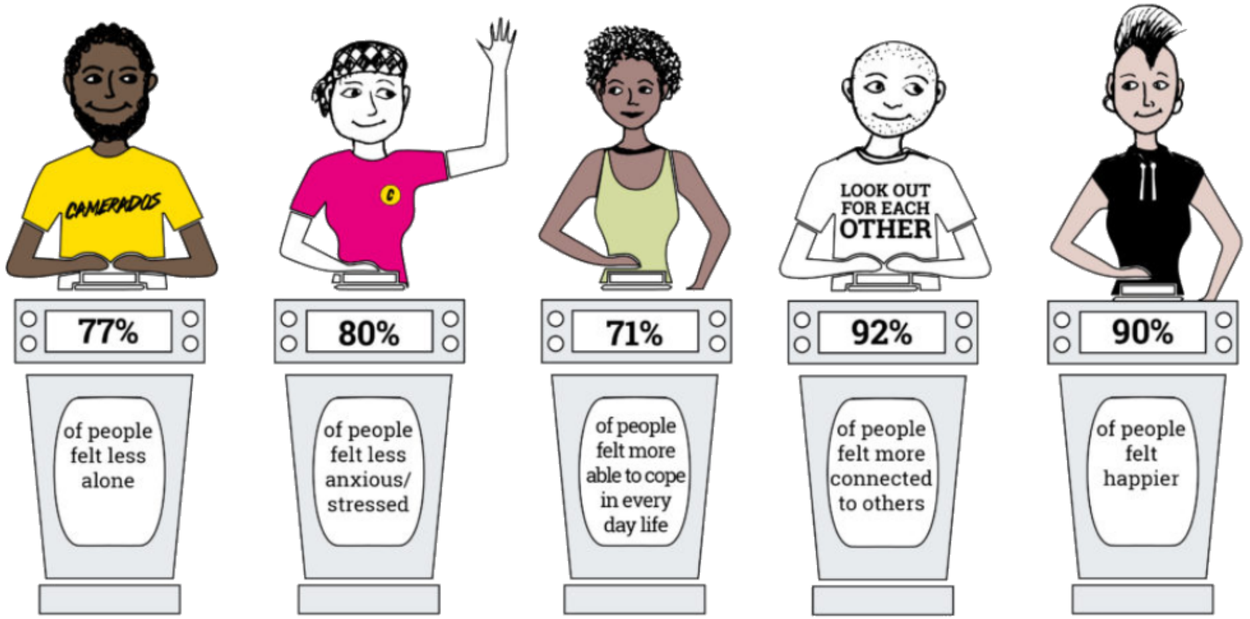
202 PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS OPEN

26 MORE PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS IN DEVELOPMENT

3,070 PEOPLE PER WEEK ON AVERAGE ATTEND PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS

1,590 HOURS PER WEEK THAT CAMERADOS PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS ARE OPEN

63 BOXES SENT OUT SO FAR THIS YEAR



EVERY WEEK NEW PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS OPEN SOMEWHERE ...AND TELL US ABOUT IT...

MSArgyll
@msargyll

@Camerados_org 😎😊 #PublicLivingRoom The sun in shining, the biscuits are out and so are lots of lovely folks looking for a blether. #BeMoreHuman



Windrush generation day in Cheetham Hill @NTCGFT over the weekend ❤️
@Camerados_org
@ChrisBernard196
@sineadei
@shaziaabutt
@hassanuln
@shaukatali1965



Warrington MacIntyre Great Communities
@WarringtonGrCo

Fresh coat of paint, fresh new space. Come and have a natter/brew with Rebecca in Warrington's freshest new Public Living Room The Old School in Fairfield this Friday from 11am-1pm. Come and get refreshed for the summer/meet new people/chat and Rebecca may even paint your nails.



You and 9 others

Sam Moon
@TheBoyMoon1

Tuckswood Cycle Hub Public Living Room today (Sat 27th May) until 2pm, just past Tuckswood Library (Norwich). Pop by for a cuppa, connect 4, a random oh and a bike repair too if you fancy! @Camerados_org @WeAreCyclingUK @NorwichCC @VoluntaryNorfo1 @BBCNorfolk



Bureau Blackburn
@BureauBlackburn

A moment from our @Camerados_org #publiclivingroom today. It was a great morning and had quietened down by this point. Looking forward to meeting @MaffPotts next week and to our Shindig next Saturday. #wearecamerados #blackburn



02

The Story of our project this year

Our mission: A public living room in every neighbourhood



Warm banks

"Cost of Living Crisis" has seen increased take up due to warm banks ...plus many imitators of PLRs !

3 X



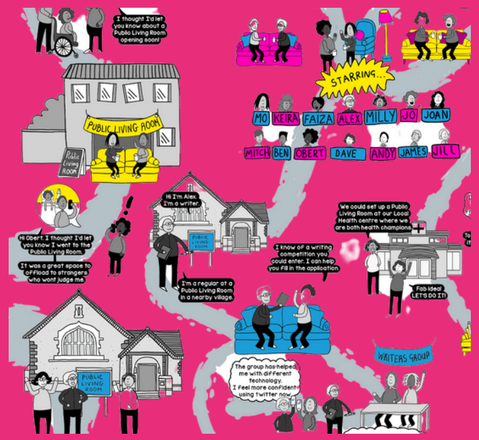
Triple the number of Public Living Rooms

Extraordinary diversity



Public Living Rooms are being run by those with disabilities, Refugee women, income deprived neighbourhoods, LGBTQI folk, rural communities

Ripple Mapping



We found a new way to measure impact



Pavement Public Living Rooms

emerging as our new activism, reached new people & inspired uptake



Shindigs

Local worked better than national for gatherings

Reduced Internal team

Period of transition for AOC



Comms Agency

12 month experiment broadening our communications

SONDER
CAUSE COMMUNICATIONS

1. TRIPLE PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS IN NEIGHBOURHOODS

The movement is made up of people giving their own time but the tiny team that inspires, resources and connects them are paid staff in an office with resources all of which is covered by our grant funding. This team is called the Association of Camerados - AOC.

In the words of someone in our movement "It feels like this year AOC really told the stories of communities, met them where they are in their streets, and been more like a support act not the lead singer" (Bob, Hastings)

It's been a big year of change internally and externally. We made the decision to simplify our mission and stick to one thing we did really well that had the biggest impact for people in communities. That mission"**A Public living room in every neighbourhood**". Though this takes many guises - led by the people themselves - it meant we had a pretty simple way of judging success and I'm pleased to say our external story is that we've tripled the number of public living rooms and the demand continues.



REASON FOR INCREASE COULD BE:

- Possible reaction against isolation of pandemic
- Warm spaces initiative (see slide on this)
- Martyn Lewis "Money saving expert" - his endorsement of our model in guidance to libraries
- People seeing pavement public living rooms







2. NEW RESOURCES - ITERATION BASED ON FEEDBACK

This year our funding has helped us develop new resources based on feedback from people in the movement. This includes both "PLR in a box" resources and items which we send communities every few months to encourage them and maintain the movement:





- People were using postcards (hung on a washing line) less and less to record stories so we adopted an idea from Hastings public living room and will now produce **a Visitors book**
- **Our new info Book in the box** - which all PLRs receive to explain the movement and especially our principles was deemed not sufficiently diverse and also felt a little too "top down". So the new book contains quotes, stories and advice direct from movement members of all backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities. The eye catching cartoons were designed by a movement member too.
- Communities receive 4 of our much loved **mugs**(!) however they will now get 6 with a different principle on each one. People prefer this to "notices" and it's a conversation starter too. We sourced a new supplier to keep costs roughly the same
- We held a **T-Shirt competition** and two members from Lancaster and Hertfordshire won.
- We worked with a **communications agency** for 12 months and they recommended we make an explanatory animation. A movement member did all of the drawings and the animation work.
- Communities wanted a **teapot** in the box so we removed some less used items and sourced one







3. EXTRAORDINARY DIVERSITY OF PLRS - RUN BY THOSE WITH DISABILITIES, REFUGEE WOMEN, INCOME DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS, LGBTQI PEOPLE, RURAL COMMUNITIES

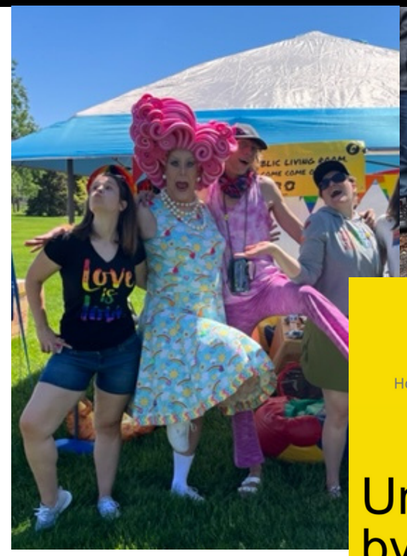
We have learnt that our mission really connects with groups of people that perhaps society views as "misfits" and different. We've learnt that something in the camerados approach makes them feel part of a community that is not based around their needs or their marginalised characteristic. In other words it is a human space not a specific safe space and this makes them feel accepted and viewed as equal and "normal". For instance in Wiltshire a quadreplegic man with other physical disabilities was told by his social worker that setting up a public living room was "too much for him". He has since set up four both inside and outside. The "Stay up late" movement that promotes the right for **people with disabilities** to party has also been captured by the camerados mission and opened public living rooms.







In Rochdale the public living room, though open to all of course, is mostly attended by **refugee women from countries such as Libya, Iran, Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt and Ukraine.**



The highest concentration of camerados public living rooms is in areas in the **top 50 places of income deprivation (ONS).** Also we have noticed they are often the area next door to a town with a higher profile and greater investment. For example Middlesbrough (not Newcastle); Wolverhampton (Not Birmingham); Rotherham (not Sheffield) and so on.

We have also noticed an increase in demand from **rural areas** including very isolated places such as Stornaway in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as well as two public living rooms in Lochgilphead. Also some camerados in the SouthWest have set up **"Farmerados"** and gained separate funding to promote our mission in the farming community. We are working closely with them to ensure the integrity of the model remains.



4. WARM BANKS / "COST OF LIVING CRISIS" HAS SEEN INCREASED TAKE UP AND PROFILE INCLUDING MANY IMITATORS

The Cost of living meant that many people were making tough choices as to whether to eat or put the heating on. Many chose the former and so were freezing in their homes. Councils, charities and community organisations began to set up "warm spaces" or "warm banks".

We issued guidance so people could benefit from the things we'd learnt about helping communities create public living rooms. This was picked up by Martyn Lewis (The Money Saving Expert) who was issuing advice to libraries in partnership with CILIP. This led to a major increase in calls from libraries. The largest "provider" of warm spaces was "Warm Welcome" who put us on their website and have since been talking to us about giving advice to warm spaces who want to continue despite winter ending as they have seen the need for such a space.

Oasis trust CEO Steve Chalk went on GMTV and BBC Breakfast to announce a national network of "living rooms". We contacted him and their sites in Bristol, Manchester and Southampton all decided to become public living rooms. We also heard from major institutions such as the National Trust, YMCA, Welsh national theatre, Royal Exchange theatre Manchester and more.

Since the weather became warmer some of the above have been in touch to ask for advice they can offer warm spaces who want to continue because they saw the benefit of the spaces over and above the need for warmth. Company and connection seemed to be the most crucial aspect of what they provided.

6 TIPS THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL WHEN SETTING UP WARM SPACES THIS WINTER



FROM THE PUBLIC LIVING ROOM PEOPLE, CAMERADOS

WRITTEN BY
MAFF POTTS, ASSOCIATION OF CAMERADOS

5. PAVEMENT PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS, EMERGING AS OUR NEW ACTIVISM, REACHED MANY NEW PEOPLE

























AND MORE...

5. PAVEMENT PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS

When the cost of living became an issue hitting communities hard we became worried about the prevailing narrative in neighbourhoods, politics and the media. As is often the case when something is designated a "crisis" people focus heavily on tangible products such as food and fuel. Both food & fuel poverty are very real issues however just as important if not more so is the crisis of connection.

When people have less money they go out less. We commissioned a **YouGov poll (see a glimpse of it opposite)** which showed that ***more than a third of adults say worries about money are likely to affect how much time they spend with friends and family over the winter*** and ***1/4 have already cancelled social plans.***

As a social species,whereas temporary isolation can feel good, habitual isolation can lead to problems. People can retreat from others, isolation spirals and this can lead to people feeling less good about themselves, mental health problems rise and quality of life can deteriorate, a support network is lost, advice is lost, and so it spirals until some very serious consequences can occur.

We want to highlight that connection was a serious business and relevant to the cost of living situation and not a fluffy "nice to have" element of life so we felt our activism had to reflect this. We looked at the areas of income deprivation Office of National Statistics and prioritised these areas as most likely to be hardest hit by the cost of living situation. We then hired a van, put furniture in it and then turned up in the neighbourhoods and created a pop up public living room on the streets and talked to anyone who sat down.

YouGov

	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
VSC__Q1. Which, if either, of the following statements apply to you? (Please select all that apply)			
Unweighted base	2135	999	1136
Base: All UK adults	2135	1035	1100
I have turned down / cancelled a forthcoming social event because I am worried about money	511	199	311
Money concerns are likely to affect how much time I spend with friends and family over the winter	770	351	419
Neither of these	939	504	435
Don't know	144	61	83
Prefer not to say	87	47	41
VSC_Q2. You previously mentioned that money concerns are likely to affect the amount of time you will be spending with friends and family over the winter...In which, if any, of the following ways are you likely to be affected? (Please select all that apply)			
Unweighted base	767	337	430
Base: All UK adults who mentioned that money concerns are likely to affect how much time they spend with family and friends over the winter	770	351	419
I won't be able to afford the cost of traveling to visit friends and family who live far away	484	214	270
I won't be able to afford to go out socially with friends and family who live locally	512	237	275
I won't be able to afford the cost of regular activities (e.g. class fees, membership fees, entry fees) where I meet lots of people I know	306	120	186
Other	44	28	16
Don't know	20	7	13
VSC_Q3. Which , if any, of the following are likely reasons to stop you going out over the winter? (Please select all that apply)			
Unweighted base	2135	999	1136
Base: All UK adults	2135	1035	1100
I feel embarrassed about not being able to afford to pay for things	478	215	263
I don't want friends to have to pay for me and I know they'll offer	388	189	199
I worry I'll be asked lots of questions about whether I'm coping financially	177	94	82

6. WE STARTED THE YEAR WITH SEVEN STAFF AND ENDED WITH TWO.

WAS THIS THE YEAR OF TRANSITION FOR AOC?



This has happened however despite some major upheavals internally. 5 people left the team of 7 including the two longest serving members of staff. None were contentious and all were positively handled. Some were planned and contractual but most were unforeseen and due to life changes.

It left us with a team of two and a movement which had just tripled so we were a worried. However we got lucky and recruited two new part-time members of staff for Finance and for Community support and thanks to great handovers from others we never missed a beat. Phew!

However without realising this has achieved through natural means what we had formally planned all along i.e. that the AOC would decrease in size as the movement grew. We had always factored this in as we didn't want to grow the organisation as we felt that would lead to the wrong behaviours and take us away from the focus on mission and our determination to get out of the way of communities. By being small it forces us to look to the people in neighbourhoods to take the action not us and to avoid just perpetuating the organisation. So it's all been rather serendipitous!

7. WORKING WITH A COMMUNICATIONS AGENCY - PROS AND CONS.

In an attempt to break out of a perceived echo chamber and reach a much wider audience we worked for 12 months with a professional communications agency called SONDER. We hoped this learning would inform our path going forward.

Pros

- Condensed our messaging and focus on our USP - Mutuality and No fixing
- Taught us how to identify PR opportunities, wrote press releases and worked relentlessly to get media opportunities
- Featured on Radio 4's "Digital Human" programme -which led directly to 7 public living rooms
- Also featured on ITV local news and BBC local radio
- They helped write & design our new Public living room book and create a 3 minute animation
- They created and planned social media content and posted it
- They carried out a YouGov poll

Cons

- We can't directly trace the tripling of PLRs directly to comms however we can see that our social media following has not significantly increased. We hoped for an exponential rise in interest, it didn't happen. This is likely because we'd grossly under-estimated how much media spend is needed these days to cut through in a packed market of messages.
- They took our messaging to a less edgy place in an attempt to attract the mainstream. Ultimately we didn't feel this reflected the tone that had attracted many to our movement previously.

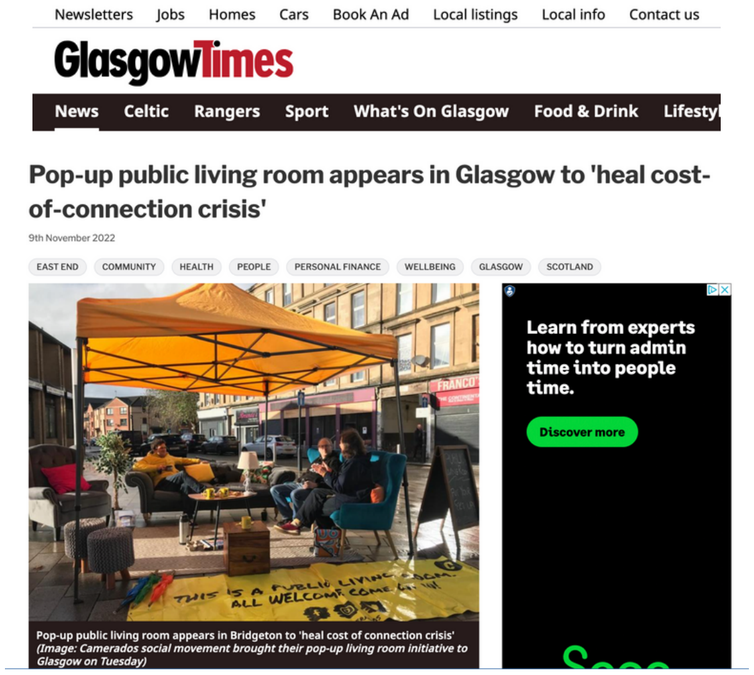
We've decided to use our ongoing limited Comms budget to create content that amplifies the voices of people in public living rooms rather than a more traditional PR approach centring around Maff and the team

As we had a great working relationship with SONDER we will keep in touch and use them for selective PR opportunities.



Dorchester's former M&S store to become 'public living room'

31 May 2022



03

How we involved people in our community

Our movement only works with TONS of involvement and leadership from those in the movement. Here's some ways we do it...

Every public living room starts with a chat where people in communities talk about what they hope for in their community.

The gatherings (“Shindigs”) are led & created entirely by the community with advice and resources from AOC.

Our Open house meetings per quarter are hosted by movement members and allow anyone to bring any issues to other movement members.

The resources are entirely open source so the community lead and implement the process themselves using our resources.

Our learning through ripple mapping involves people plotting their own impact using our tools.

We iterate constantly our resources and communications based on the stories we collect and the ripple mapping which occurs.

04 The difference we're making big and small

This summative insight report is based on 63 stories gathered from members of and people connected to the Camerados movement between January and September 2022 and ideas that emerged during various sense-making activities with the movement held during this period. The stories have been gathered using the Community Reporting methodology.



Dr Hayley Trowbridge

Dr Hayley is the Strategic lead for **People's Voice Media** which launched the Community Reporting movement in 2007. It's a method that uses digital tools to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways. We never want to harvest people's experience for our own ends so aim to honour people's stories ethically and respectfully.

It really is worth reading the full report

"A Really Magical Place"
Summative Story insight report, Dec 2022


People's Voice Media
Connecting Communities

Head Office: The Fort Offices, Artillery Business Park, Park Hall, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 4AD.
Email: enquiries@peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Website: https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk
Company No:3083575
Charity No:1059681

"A really magical space"
Summative Story Insight Report, December 2022

Camerados are working with People's Voice Media as part of an ongoing learning process that seeks to better understand how the movement works, how it can be developed further and the impact that the activities of the Camerados movement makes.

This summative insight report is based on 63 stories gathered from members of and people connected to the Camerados movement between January and September 2022 and ideas that emerged during various sense-making activities with the movement held during this period. The stories have been gathered using the Community Reporting methodology, which is a digital storytelling approach rooted in lived experience. This report synthesises the findings of three previous insight reports, published over the first three quarters of 2022. It covers the topics of the principles of Camerados, togetherness and a sense of belonging, and thoughts around Public Living Rooms (PLRs).

"This isn't about fixing, this is about being alongside and when we do that, we realise we can be together": The principles and how Camerados are using them

but if you don't have time here's some key things that jumped out...

STUFF THAT WORKS WELL

- They felt that the principles were key in creating this environment and they **enabled people to grow and thrive**
- PLR is the "**most powerful community engagement thing they had ever done**"
- Camerados are taking these principles outside of PLRs and **into other spaces**
- This allows people who might be otherwise **socially isolated** to get out and meet new folk
- Particularly helped to tackle the **isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic especially children** who had experienced mental health issues through the lockdowns and this was both helpful for the children and parents as it was a space where they could discuss things and relate to one another.
- there is **a beauty in talking to strangers** as there is less pressure and you worry less



STUFF TO WORK ON



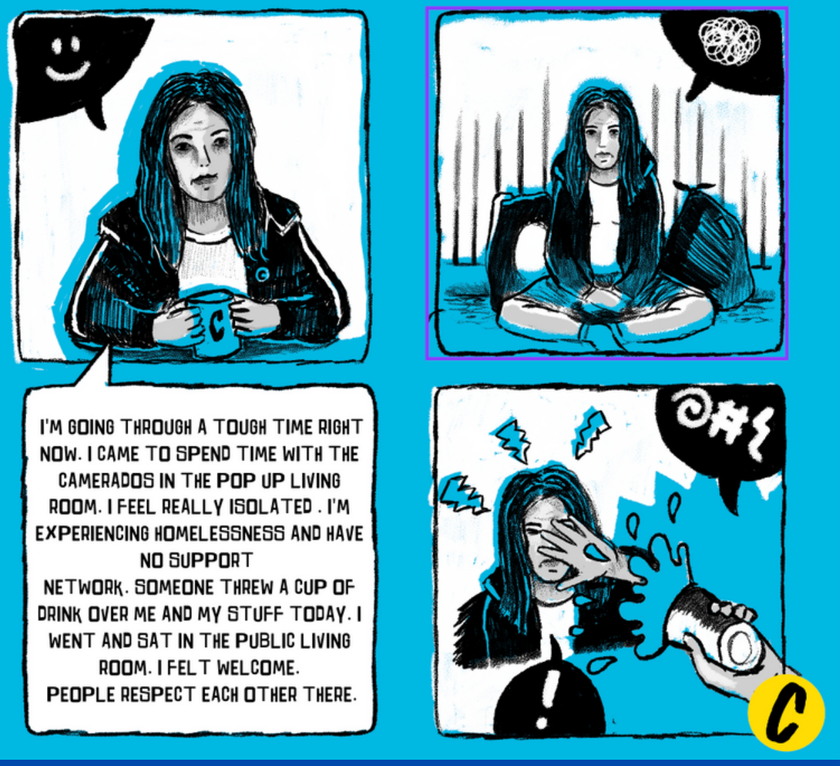
- **Who was responsible** for making sure the principles were followed by everyone?
- **For some people there were still barriers in place to setting-up a PLR**. As one Camerado explained: "People over think it and worry".
- Some Camerados also felt there should be **more of an option to individualise** the contents of the box in line with the movements desire to be people-led.

STORIES FROM THE MOVEMENT



I WENT OUT TODAY TO GET SOME SHOES FROM THE CHARITY SHOP. I SAT DOWN FOR A CHAT IN A PAVEMENT PUBLIC LIVING ROOM. I'M IN THE U.K. SEEKING ASYLUM. MY MUM DIED AND I WASN'T ABLE TO GO TO THE FUNERAL....
IT WAS GOOD TO TAKE TIME TO TALK TO FOLK IN THE POP UP LIVING ROOM. I FELT BETTER ABOUT MY DAY.

STORIES FROM THE MOVEMENT



I'M GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME RIGHT NOW. I CAME TO SPEND TIME WITH THE CAMERADOS IN THE POP UP LIVING ROOM. I FEEL REALLY ISOLATED . I'M EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND HAVE NO SUPPORT
NETWORK. SOMEONE THREW A CUP OF DRINK OVER ME AND MY STUFF TODAY. I WENT AND SAT IN THE PUBLIC LIVING ROOM. I FELT WELCOME.
PEOPLE RESPECT EACH OTHER THERE.

STORIES FROM THE MOVEMENT



I CAME ACROSS THE PUBLIC LIVING ROOM WHILST IN READING TRYING TO GET MY SON BACK. I HAVE NOT SEEN HIM IN A LONG TIME.

MY HUSBAND LEFT ME...

HE TOOK MY SON ON THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL.
I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE.



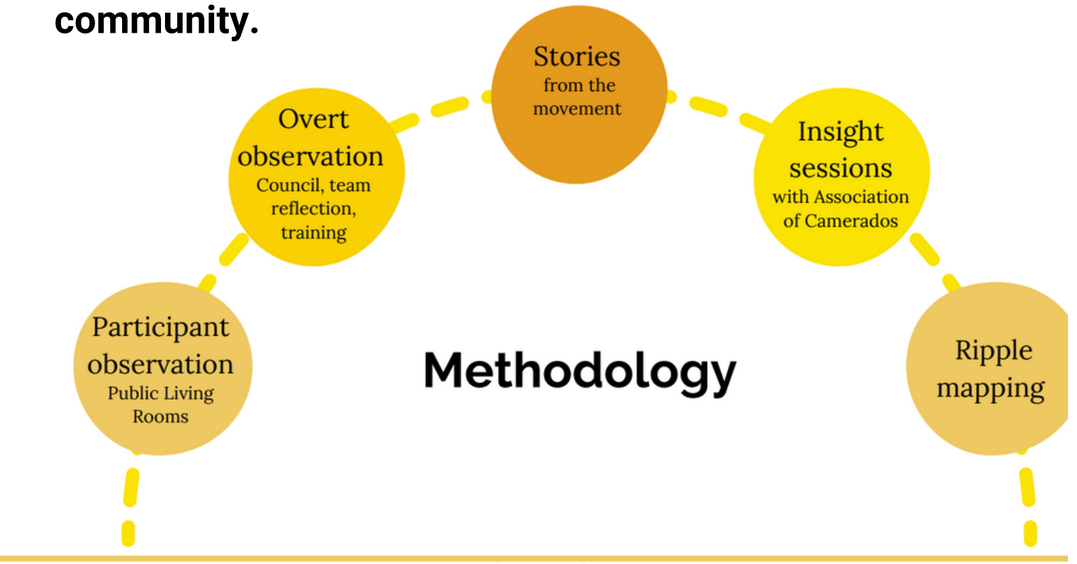
Dr Martha Newson

An **anthropologist** (you may know her from the TODAY programme or Sky news!) based at the Universities of Greenwich and Oxford, she leads research on **group bonding, ritual,** and **community.**

Martha analyses all the stories and data collected by ***People's Voice Media;*** visits public living rooms; and spends time with the AOC team each quarter.

Her annual report is found here

Here are her top line findings



1

Camerados saves lives.

Several people involved in the movement directly ascribe Camerados as saving their own or others' lives. The movement grew rapidly pre-2020, before many Public Living Rooms were shut during the pandemic. However, in the darkest times of isolation during the Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK, Camerados was a beacon of connection and humour online and, gradually, in person. The life-changing and life-saving power of the movement lies in the application of its principles.

2

Camerados creates space for social connections where they did not previously exist.

People who report having been isolated or lonely form connections with others, and communities unite through Camerados-inspired, person-led events. This has led to lasting social structures, with Camerados providing the social 'glue', and more confident communities.

3

The Principles ripple through personal, organisational and societal structures.

The personal development and relationships that evolve through the movement ripple into other areas of people's lives, ultimately affecting work spaces and wider society. These ripples also tend to be influenced by the movement's principles.

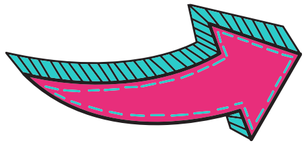
4

Each Public Living Room and each camerado is unique.

The movement is aware of the true diversity it attracts, including some of society's most vulnerable people, and continues to work on improving its inclusivity. Nonetheless, while Public Living Rooms vary, they all foster a sense of connection through shared experiences and humour.

KEY IMPACT AREAS

Three areas of impact were identified using a deductive approach to ripple mapping. Themes within these overarching areas have emerged by applying inductive analysis to the ripple maps and evidence gleaned from across the research period. Specific community impacts are described on the next page.





Individual impacts

- Camerados spaces lead to connection with others.
- These social connections relate to self-esteem and wellbeing.
- Exposure to Camerados and the Principles can influence individuals' values and lead to behavioural changes (e.g., getting out more and trying new things).
- Encouraging camerados to 'host' spaces themselves, rather than receiving the movement like a service, fosters confidence and sustains Public Living Rooms longer term.
- Individual impacts appeared to be particularly significant in vulnerable or less able populations, such as those with learning difficulties.



Organisational impacts

- Camerados has influenced the internal values of multiple organisations, i.e., they have become more 'human'.
- Some organisations have benefited by acting on these attitudinal shifts to address power inequalities (e.g., no lanyards).
- In some cases, organisations' loads have been reduced by the work Camerados does.



Societal impacts

- Camerados events have bought communities together, which in turn has led to the creation of new social structures (e.g., women starting businesses together).
- Public Living Rooms inspire connections with other groups, particularly like-minded movements, leading to wider social changes.
- Camerados' visibility off- and on-line may have led to influence at a national level (e.g., BBC coverage).

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

INCREASED SOCIAL SUPPORT & DECREASED SOCIAL ISOLATION

BRINGING TOGETHER DIVERSE PEOPLE AND CULTURES

i.e., challenging assumptions, prejudice, and stigma.

MORE PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS LEAD TO MORE PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS

i.e., fostering more spaces where people and communities can benefit from the movement.



PEOPLE-FIRST SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

INCREASED COMMUNITY SPIRIT

CREATING LINKS TO COMMUNITY PROVISION

e.g., youth clubs, food projects, allotments, swap shops, bicycle recycling, plays, parties, craft groups, food banks, warm spaces.

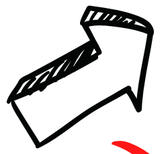
SPREAD AWARENESS OF PUBLIC LIVING ROOMS & THE PRINCIPLES

e.g., with social workers, town council, town mayor. Leading to more people finding out about and benefiting from the movement.

05 **What we've learnt - what's worked and what hasn't**

06 **How we're changing what we do**

*We've combined these two headings as we always think about how to change what we do after we've learnt what has worked and what hasn't. *



Arrow means: we learnt and it became...

We learnt that our **Governance** engagement didn't work

Council → Open House

We learnt that **gatherings** need to be local

Fiesta → Local "Shindigs"

We learnt better ways to gather **stories**

Postcards → Visitor book

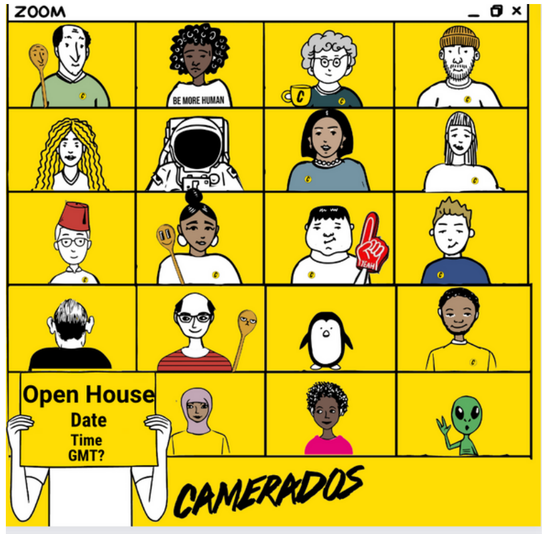
We changed how we do **Communications**

Comms agency → Content creation and a generous "support act" approach*

See more detail overleaf

*See Pros and Cons slide about Comms

05 What we've learnt - what's worked and what hasn't



Council - Open House

Our independent group of movement members who were formed to support and challenge the movement decided to disband as it wasn't working. Insufficient engagement and a reluctance to criticise the AOC prompted the group to suggest a return to open zoom calls once a quarter. We call this "Open House" and it is a place where anyone in the movement could have their say. We've implemented this and already it is prompted changes directly from input from those who attend (e.g. we've brought back on-line "SpoonRoom" after it was requested).

They are hosted by people in the movement who nominate themselves and people also suggest themes to debate.



06 How we're changing what we do

Fiesta - Shindigs

Nobody engaged with the idea of a national gathering. Possibly a mix of post-pandemic nervousness, cost of living impacting travel costs; and overall the fact that people identify more with their own local public living room than an international movement.

So we divided up the budget for the national gathering and gave it to communities spread across UK to hold local gatherings and invite camerados from their region.

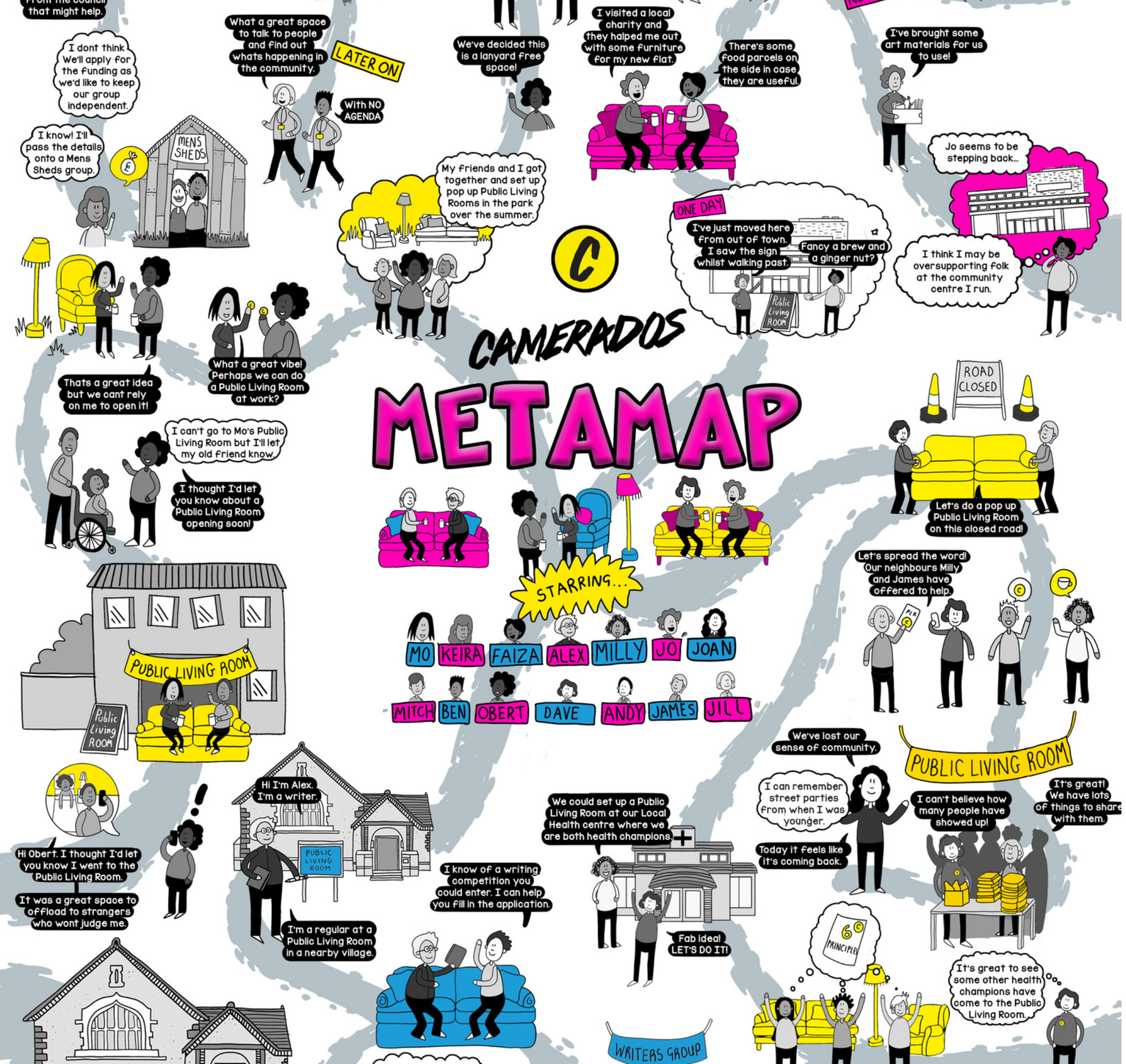
So far 5 have happened and 5 more are planned.



Postcards - visitor book

We've noticed that less and less people are writing their stories on the postcards we include in the box. These are to display in the public living room to inspire others and for AOC to learn about the impact that's happening.

Hastings PLR use a visitor book successfully so we've adopted this idea and will now put that in the box instead of postcards.



THE RIPPLES WE'RE MAKING...

We felt that our current learning approach wasn't doing the following:

a) Involving people in assessing the impact THEMSELVES
b) capturing the major impacts that happen in people's lives which start as tiny micro interactions and have knock on effects.

So we did some research and found "Ripple effect mapping" and adapted it to our own use. People put their public living room at the centre then through conversation with others build a mindmap-style image of ripples of the things that have happened as a result of the PLR. They look back and see just what a difference it has made. The participant often feels surprised and validated much more than what they often see as just some sofas and biscuits!

If you'd like ot know more please get in touch
cuppa@camerados.org

FOLLOW THE RIPPLES AND SEE THE IMPACT THROUGH REAL LIFE STORIES...

Whilst they are chatting, Kiera mentions that she has set-up a food share group with Salma who she met at a PLR earlier in the Summer. It's somewhere that they can share food but also find friendship. Jill tells her about a small bit of funding available from the Council that could help.

Ben and Jill grab a brew and sit down on the picnic blankets. Pretty soon they are chatting and laughing with Kiera and Mitch about their pets. They have that much fun they realise they've missed a Teams meeting!

Faiza mentions to Jo that there's some food parcels on the side, in case they are useful. She also knows Andy has also just moved into a new flat and tells him about the charity that Jo mentioned.

Next week, Andy pops down to the Charity and he's given an electric blanket to help keep warm at home.

Keira decides not to apply for the funding as they like their group being independent and self-sustained, but she does pass on the details to a local Men's Shed project.

On the way back to the office, Ben and Jill talk about how the PLR gave them space to just to talk to people and find out what is happening in the community without an agenda.

They decide it is a lanyard free space. This surprises a Ben and Jill who work for the Council and have dropped in, but they do take them off.

Jo mentions they've visited a local charity and they've helped with them with some furniture for their new flat.

Next week, Jo drops by again and brings some arts materials. Some of the people there are interested and together they start to create collages whilst they chat.

Faiza offers them a brew and a ginger nut, and they get chatting.

Faiza sees how Jo is stepping back and how the others are taking the lead. She decides that in her job managing a Community Centre she is going to make some changes in how she works. She feels she may 'over support' and through Jo, she has seen the value in stepping back a bit.

Obert has gathered his friends and they have set-up pop-up PLRs in the local park over the Summer.

Jo has just moved to a new town. Whilst walking down the high street, they see a banner for a PLR and they drop in…

Obert thinks it is a great idea but says that it can't rely on him to run it.

Obert's colleague - Mo - decides to drop by. He's thinks the 'vibe' is great and chats with Obert about them doing a PLR at work.



A road has been closed off by the Council in Dave's local community. Him and Lionel have an idea - a pop-up street PLR!

Milly and Lionel decide to set-up a regular PLR in a local health centre where they are both Health Champions.

Mo decides to set-up the PLR in the reception area of the building but to open it up to the public. Signs and social media let the community know this is happening.

Obert can't come to the first PLR but he does let an old friend who has been a bit isolated as they are the main carer for a family member know about it. To Obert's surprise they let him know they went and they'll be back next time - it was a great space for them to offload to strangers who won't judge them.

Alex is a regular at a PLR in a church in a nearby village. They are a writer.

Together with their neighbours - Milly and James - they spread the word.

Other Health Champions attend the PLR. The principles help them develop new ideas for improving local people's health.

The centre sometimes presents barriers to them running the PLR in the space. When this happens they "push back".

They are surprised by how many people come! They bring food, games and clothes to swap.

"We've lost our sense of community" says Joan who can remember many street parties when she was younger. "Today feels like it's coming back".

They are getting more confident with this and use the principles to provide "constructive challenge" to the centre and are now collaborating on new projects.

The people they've met at the PLR encourage them to keep writing the stories. One Camerado shared a local story competition with Alex… and helped Alex submit their work.

They didn't win the competition but Alex met some other writers and has joined their writing group.

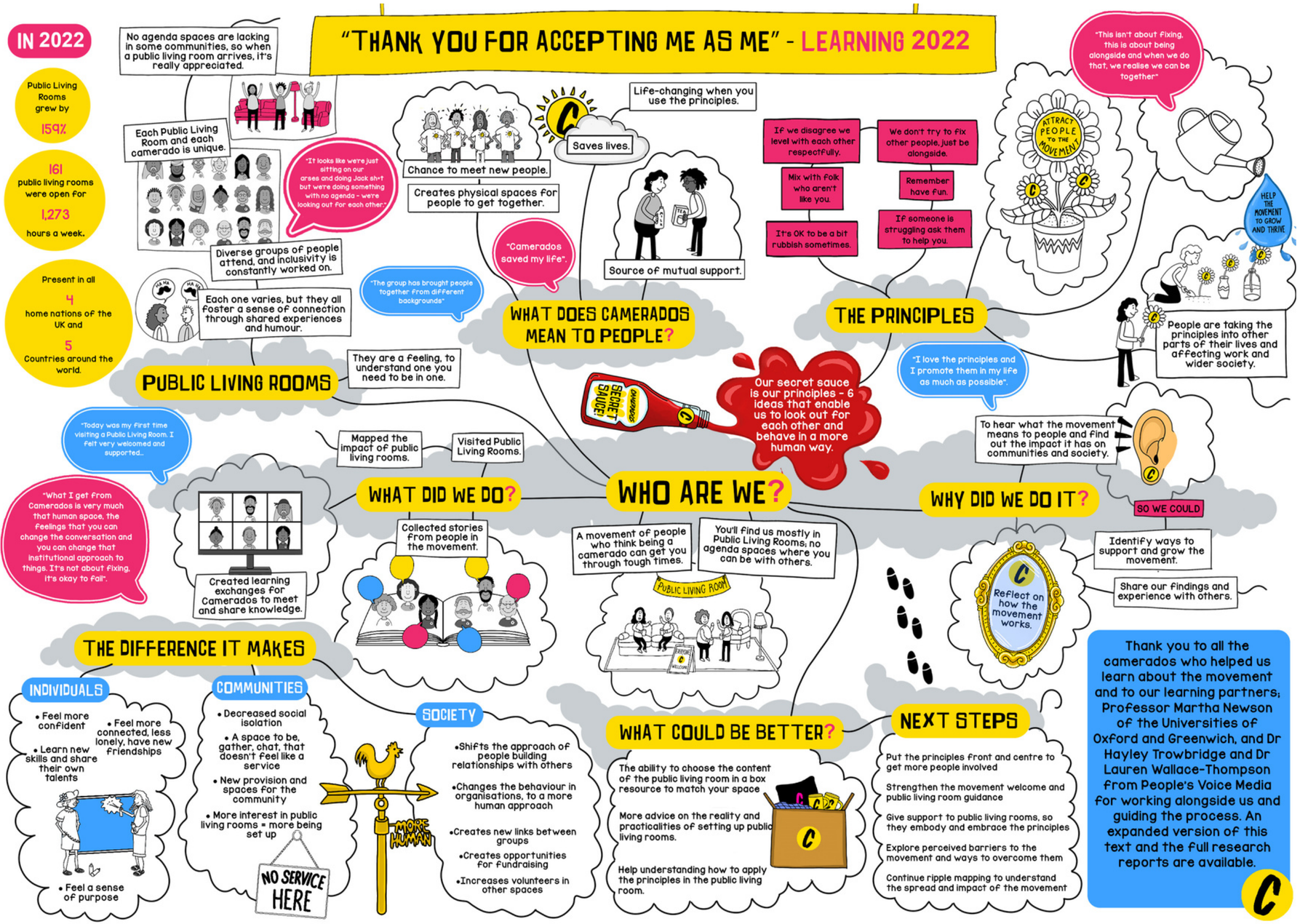
This group has help Alex with different technology and they feel more confident now in using Twitter.

Alex shares this with the people who set-up the PLR at the church. They share some tips with Alex.

They struggled to get people to come and this made them feel more isolated.

Alex decides to run their own PLR in their own village.

THE LEARNING POSTER



- We sent out this poster so that all camerados can feel part of our learning.
- Also we're providing PLRs with a menu style card mount that can sit on tables advertising the BRAIN to all camerados who wander in.
- The BRAIN is our repository of stories and any interesting learning people may want to report. It's open to everyone to contribute to it.

07 Conclusion and the Future



Despite internal contraction we've seen external expansion. We are very grateful for the continued inspiration and motivation which comes from the people themselves in neighbourhoods who are demonstrating their desire to get together despite the collective trauma of the pandemic and followed swiftly by the impact of the cost of living situation. Thanks to them and their indomitable and hopeful spirit we shall see 200 public living rooms by the end of July 2023.

We've also accepted that we will never know the full impact due to the micro-interactions and conversations which occur everywhere as an effect of people seeing and stopping by public living rooms.

This is why we developed Ripple Mapping which is proving very popular and effective. Pavement public living rooms have also put the issue of connection at the heart of poverty and inequality debates and led to more people ot be inspired. Our mission of INSPIRE - RESOURCE - CONNECT remains. Perhaps this year our inspire turned up the dial in the streets, we shifted a little more to resources and we still struggled with connect (something we continue to iterate).

We need to raise our game in both CONNECT and also our own revenue generation. That is a big goal between now and 2025 and we hope to do this mainly via our own approach to training (non prescriptive) and (early ideas) using music events to sell tickets and merchandise.

For the future see the following slide...





OUR 2023 - 2025 STRATEGY

This is very top line strategy from our board however I think we can expect to see innovations post 2025 such as

- Regional lock ups for furniture &other items for community use
- Regional campfires led by PLRs at regional level
- Sector specific resources capitalising on our experiences in
  - housing
  - schools
  - hospitals
  - and more



DID WE DO WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD IN OUR LAST REPORT?

This is a list we put in our last report about what we would achieve int he future - the pink is our response one year later.

- **More public living rooms in neighbourhoods so people get through tough times.** **YES** - Tripled the number
- Engaging with those most struggling with the **cost of living crisis.** **YES** through pavement Public living rooms, membership of the Cost of Living Alliance and through our story gathering, ripple mapping and YouGov poll
- Even more street activism with **Pavement Public living Rooms - Yes.** Visited a neigbourhod almost every week.
- Increased involvement and **leadership from the movement.** **YES and NO.** Council disbanded but replaced by Open House
- **Increase number of spokespeople from the movement** lessening the reliance on the founder, Maff, and promoting our diversity. **YES and NO**. Many more people have led events and speaking sessions than every before. However Maff remains main voice.
- **Greater quality assurance** through Council insight & gentle guiding by our Profiteroles visiting public living rooms for tea and stories. **NO and YES** - Profiteroles didn't last and morphed into general associate days. These have happened though and aswell as our story gatering on zoom has brought tons of insight.
- **Continued iteration of the resources** that AoC provides both on-line and physically **YES** we've iterated with the visitor's book, principles on mugs and more
- Figuring out a way to "connect" the movement more via **campfires & events - YES** We created Shindigs with the movement - the funding of local events rather than a national one.
- **Greater use of our principles** in multiple sectors working with people who are struggling **NO. We haven't made sufficient progress on sector specific growth**
- **Greater public awareness & engagement** - **YES.** the Sonder Comms agency experiment worked well in many ways but also showed us that raising awareness through supporting the communities will work better than a national mouthpiece.
- **Period of stability** for AOC team. **NO.** Many team members left. However already in 2023 the new team seem pretty stable.
- World peace and a way to wash **socks** without losing them* **Still working on it!**

WELL DONE YOU GOT TO THE END!



Please holler if there's anything you want to dig into or talk about - there's a lot here.

And we REALLY do mean it - WE'D LOVE TO HEAR MORE FROM YOU and help your work in any way we can.

Thanks again for your support and encouragement, you rock!

Association of Camerados
JULY 2023



THANK YOU FOR READING THIS!