

Story: Community researchers in Camden

Camden Council has recruited a range of local people to sign up and be paid as “community researchers”, rather than relying on external and expensive agencies who don’t know the lie of the land. Researchers range from parents who need flexible hours to the long-term unemployed.

After receiving training (in participatory appraisal and quantitative research techniques) their work includes face-to-face interviews and raising awareness about local issues. So far they have gathered information on topics such as public health, and consulted residents on social housing policy.

It’s a classic example of a place-based approach: training local people, tapping into the ethos of the area, recognising and partnering with the local academic sector. Most importantly, it’s about getting insight from the people who know the place best, and who are already established in the community. It therefore helps the council to be more directly engaged than if they just hired an external agency.

This is a great example of the relationship between place and engagement. By understanding their borough, Camden were able to see this hidden capacity. This understanding of place saved money. But it also helped create a research team with far more invested in the area, and far better able to build a dialogue with other residents.

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