

NIHR
Community Engagement Toolkit
as illustrated by...

ROOTED IN NATURE



*Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under the UK Research and Innovation
'Mobilising Cultural and Natural Assets to Combat Health Inequalities' fund.*

Created by: Charley McFarlane-Troy

Rooted in Nature

We are a research group comprised of academic researchers, community partners, nature-based practitioners, and young advisors.

Objectives:

- Understand what young people value in nature-based activities
- Understand what the ingredients to a successful nature-based programme are
- Understand the challenges to delivering a nature-based programme

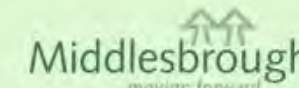
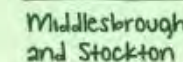
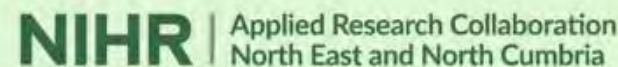


WHO MAKES UP THE ROOTED IN NATURE TEAM?

Researchers & Academics

Catherine El Zerbi (Newcastle University)
Charley McFarlane-Troy (Newcastle University)
Josephine Wildman (Newcastle University)
Emma Howitt (Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind)
Sarah Banks (Durham University)
Clare Woolhouse (Edge Hill University)
Clare Bambra (Newcastle University)
Janice McLaughlin (Newcastle University)

Collaborating Organisations



Young Advisors

Our young advisors are paid members of our team and provide support by attending meetings, providing advice on research methods and language used, in addition to ensuring the findings are contextualised in ways that are relevant to young people

Unofficial Mascot (Aiko)



Practitioners & Partners

Leah Jonhstone (Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind)
Paul Robinson (Middlesbrough Environment City)
Scott Lloyd (Middlesbrough Council)
Catherine Howell (Barefoot Kitchen)
Kevin Franks (Youth Focus: North East)
Mat Dove-Jones (Tees Valley Wildlife Trust)
Bini Araia (Investing in People & Culture)
Brian Simpson (Middlesbrough Environment City)

TRAVELLING THE PATH TOGETHER

It was our intention from the very beginning of the project that this should be a community effort focused on co-production with our voluntary organisation partners. We work with Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind, Middlesbrough Environment City, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Barefoot Kitchen, and Youth Focus North East.

In this blog, members of our team use the NIHR Community Engagement Toolkit to reflect on how successfully we have engaged with each other, crossing boundaries between the academic & voluntary sectors. We will consider particularly effective ways we've used the toolkit recommendations, the positive effects this has had, and ways we can improve engagement in our next project.

The toolkit can be found here: <https://www.rdsresources.org.uk/ce-toolkit>





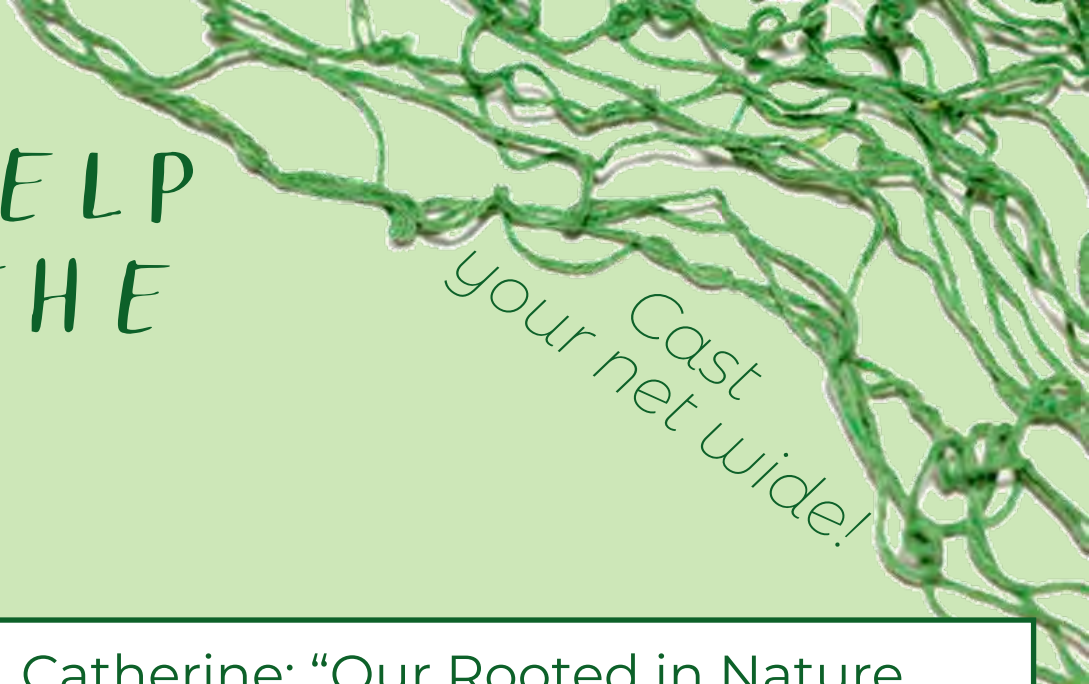
1. DO THE GROUNDWORK & PREPARE

Catherine (Research Lead for RiN): “In the four months leading up to the submission of our Rooted in Nature funding application, myself, Emma, and Jo met regularly to learn more about Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind’s Rooted in Nature programme, and to brainstorm potential study designs. During our exchanges, Emma underlined the importance of adopting a community development approach which needed to be in line with the community values and ethos of Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind (MSM). Fortunately, community development approaches and syndemic models of health were precisely what we were keen to pursue too. This meant that we could rely on each other’s shared values moving forward.”

Emma (Mind Chief Executive Officer): “A crucial part of the planning process was seeking the advice of young people. To do this, we at MSM ran two focus groups with young people currently involved in MSM activities. We asked for advice on; (i) The areas young people considered important for us to research, (ii) Young advisor roles and if young people would be interested in learning how to design research, (iii) The types of research methods young people might like to engage in. The research team then matched these priorities to relevant academic experts and invited them to be Co-Investigators.”



2. FIND TRUSTED COMMUNITY WORKERS/ LEADERS WHO CAN HELP BROKER INTRODUCTIONS WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

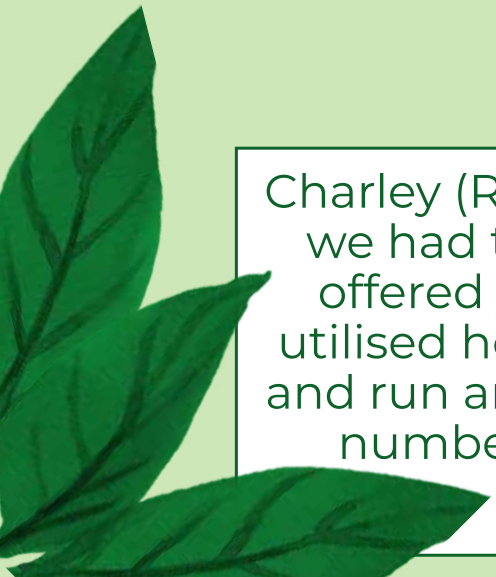


Emma: "Catherine asked my advice on contacting relevant groups from Middlesbrough. I then introduced her to leaders from these groups. Catherine then invited them to join the funding application as named collaborators. This ensured that as many groups as possible, with a vested interest in the success of the project, were invited to take part in it."



Charley (Researcher): "Near the beginning of the project, we had trouble getting the word out about what RiN offered young people. Leah, the project lead for RiN, utilised her local knowledge of nearby schools to create and run an after-school club. Thanks to Leah, participant numbers rose as she was able to make the project relevant to local young people."

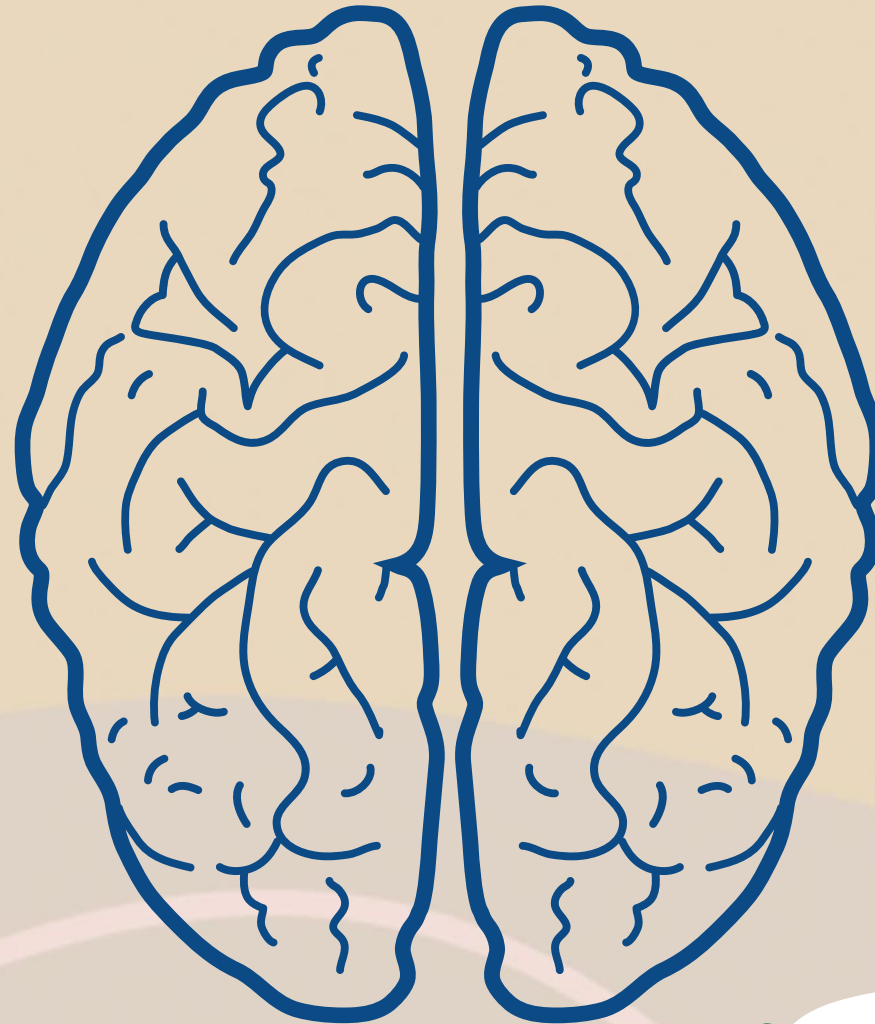
Catherine: "Our Rooted in Nature Advisory Group meet roughly every two months. Here, we share study updates and ask our collaborators for advice. Our collaborators generously provide their time to advocate for young people, nature-based practitioners and the communities of Middlesbrough, ensuring their voices are listened to, understood, respected and accurately represented throughout the research. They also advise on the feasibility and acceptability of our research approach and methods, recruitment strategies, plus ethics and safeguarding of our young advisors and participants as well as nature-based practitioners."



3. RESPECT THE VAST KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITIES

Paul (RiN practitioner):
"Charley has always integrated herself in the activities we run; she respects my knowledge as a practitioner by asking my opinion and following my lead whilst on activities."

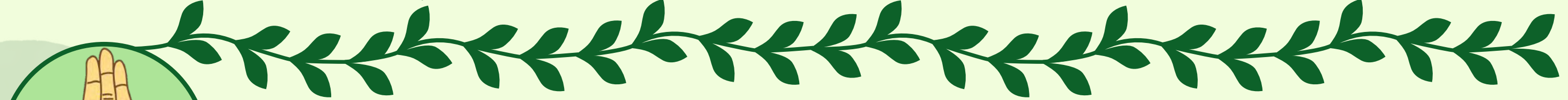
Mat (RiN practitioner):
"Yes, she doesn't just appear once a month and expect our time, she is genuinely invested in the success of the project."



Leah (MSM RiN Programme Lead):
"Charley and Catherine don't attempt to take control of sessions, they respect my practitioner knowledge by only providing support when I ask."

Charley:
"Respecting our practitioners' knowledge also includes respecting how they'd like to share it. One of my favourite ways in which we've gathered the vast knowledge of practitioners is through walking interviews; walking and talking suits our practitioners' preferences, lifestyles and hobbies."

4. BE HONEST ABOUT THE SCOPE AND RESOURCES. DON'T OVER PROMISE; AGREE WAYS OF WORKING & CORE VALUES.



Leah: "I appreciate that the research team are careful to explain their research well to our partners. They make our partners feel comfortable enough to ask questions and engage. Also, I love the optional extras the research project offers - like this blog! It's nice to have opportunities that never feel forced."

Charley "One of the best outcomes of having such an honest and well-developed relationship with our partners is that we are able to adjust how we work to further develop our approach based on their feedback. In an attempt to prevent practitioners feeling overwhelmed by meetings, we would sometimes hold meetings with leaders of each organisation and ask them to feed forward the information. However, having listened to the practitioner feedback on this, in the future we will create an open invitation for practitioners so that there is less opportunity for messages to get lost in translation and more opportunity for practitioners to weigh in with specialist knowledge beyond the organisational level."



Mat: "The managers of each organisation seem to have good a grip of what's going on. Although, sometimes the message can get lost as the information feeds forward to the practitioner."



Paul: "It might be useful to include everyone involved in the project in a few longer meetings at the beginning, so that everyone receives the initial information first hand and can share their different experiences."



5. BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT WHERE AND WHEN YOU ARRANGE MEETINGS

Mat: "I appreciate the informality of a lot of the meetings – meeting at coffee shops or going for a walk and talk is always a more relaxing and effective way of discussing the project".

Cheers

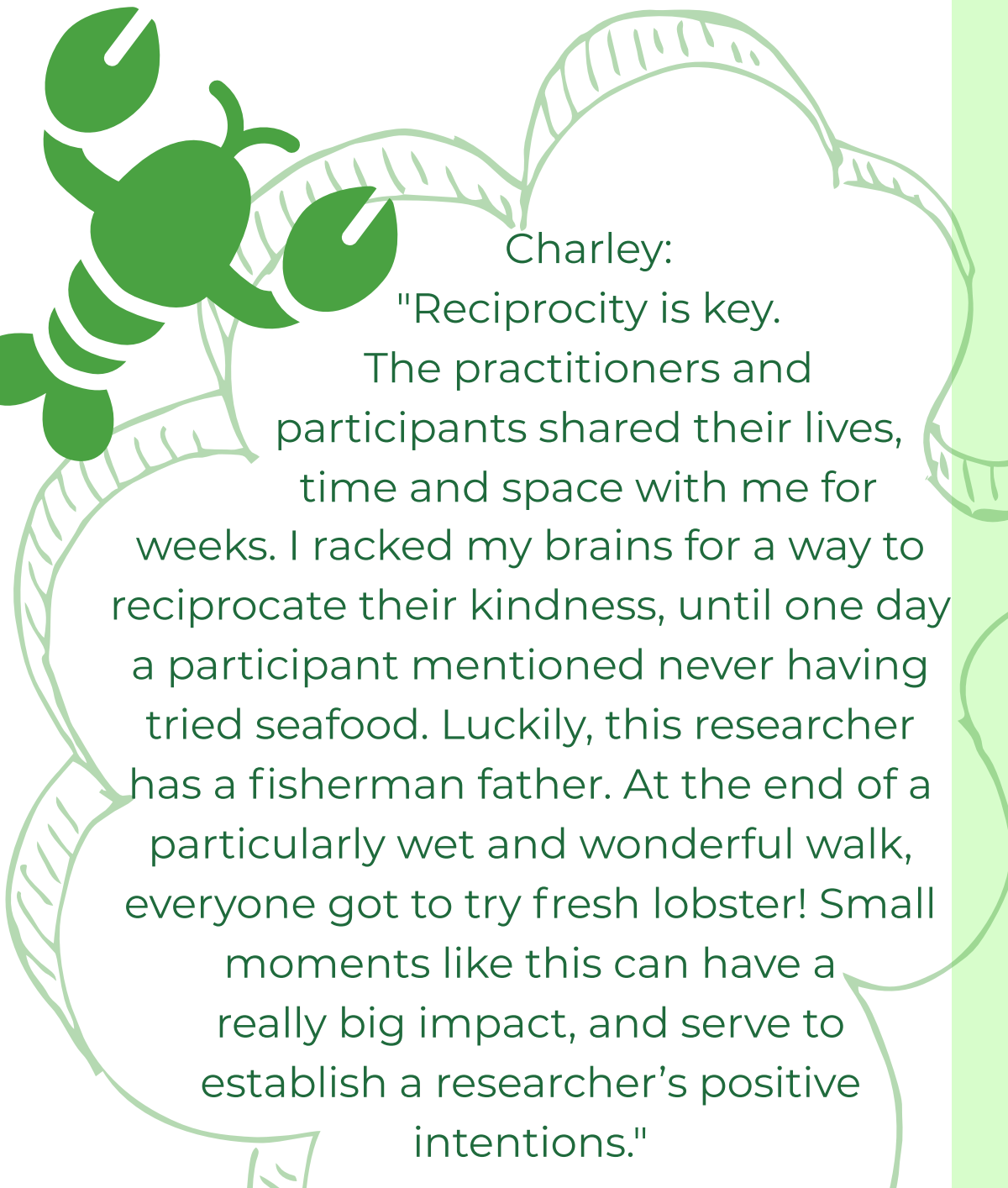


Charley: "I agree with Mat, it's very important to practice what we preach and engage with nature ourselves! I really appreciate the 'touch base' coffee meetings we have, it gives me a chance to check in with practitioners without the formality of an office that can sometimes stifle open communication."

Paul: "Charley always comes to us in Middlesbrough rather than asking us to come to Newcastle, this respects our time and so prevents project time being lost."

Leah: "Yes, Charley and Catherine always try to accommodate whichever time and place is more convenient to me."

6. BE GENEROUS, BUILD IN IMPACT AND GIVE BACK BEYOND YOUR SPECIFIC PROJECT NEEDS



Charley:

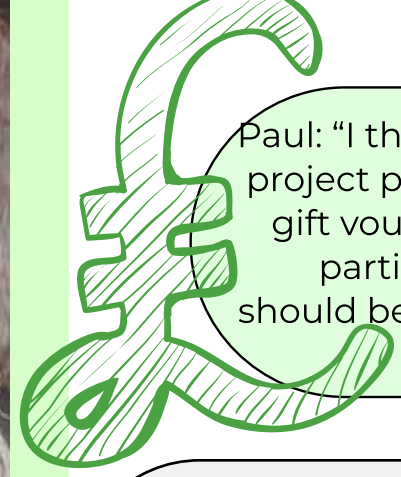
"Reciprocity is key.

The practitioners and participants shared their lives, time and space with me for weeks. I racked my brains for a way to reciprocate their kindness, until one day a participant mentioned never having tried seafood. Luckily, this researcher has a fisherman father. At the end of a particularly wet and wonderful walk, everyone got to try fresh lobster! Small moments like this can have a really big impact, and serve to establish a researcher's positive intentions."



Leah:

"I feel like their involvement goes beyond their own needs, there's a genuine desire to support the community they are researching."



Paul: "I think it's excellent that the research project pays people appropriately; giving a gift voucher to each interviewee & survey participant is exactly what researchers should be doing – everyone should be paid properly for their time."

Mat: "Investing time in attending the activities, showing empathy and compassion for our service users and making personal connections on this project is so important."

Paul: "That's right, it's fantastic that Catherine and Charley recognise the importance of Charley being generous with her time down here, supporting on the project interventions despite most interventions being outside the age-remit of the research project."

Leah: "Yes, I think I expected a researcher to just stand in the corner and take notes, but Charley and Catherine take on support roles when attending RiN activities".

Leah: "Charley even attended the Festive Fun Day I organised as we needed help in the kitchen. Another member of the research team, Clare, also put on a photo-elicitation workshop, offering skills to the voluntary community for free."

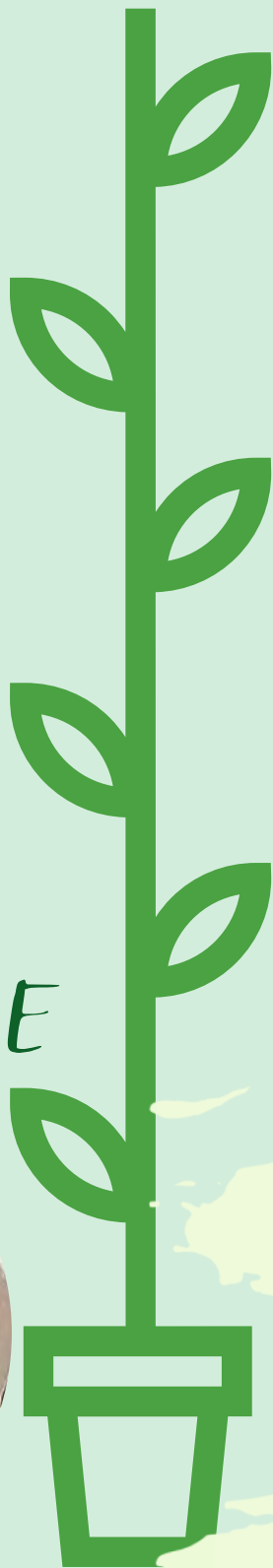
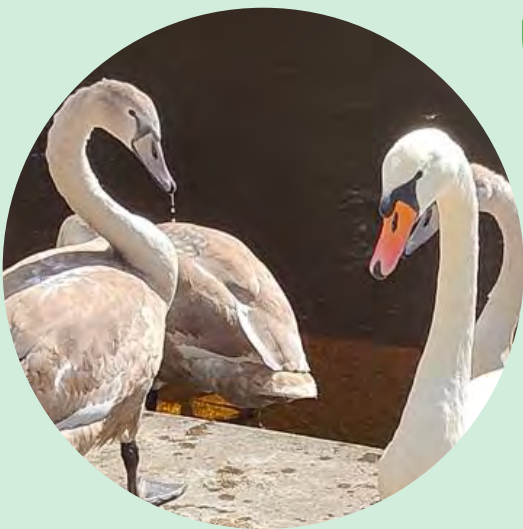
7. INVEST TIME AND DEVELOP TRUST



STAY



THE COURSE



Leah: "I never feel rushed by the research team; they never present their agenda as more important. Charley, as the embedded researcher, has made an effort to build genuine relationships rather than transactional relationships, we share more than the project, for example - our dogs!"

Paul: "I wondered how involved a researcher would be, I was pleasantly surprised when Charley got involved by talking to attendees and making them feel welcome at the activity. I could see how invested she was in the participants really getting the most out of RiN."

Mat: "I think it would be impossible to build these trusting relationships if the researcher tried to be separate from the project activities and the service users."

Charley: "Being an embedded researcher is a 2-way street. For example, when it became clear that particular RiN activities would be more useful to the research, I would still attend a wide variety throughout the project because it is important to keep in touch with participants and practitioners across the study, not just those who can provide the most data."



8. BE CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE USING DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING



Mat: "Having a researcher who takes part regularly, engages and just makes herself personable even bringing her dog when she knows participants will enjoy it, gives a lot of depth and meaning to the research. There's context there behind the notes and data, she knows what things look like on the ground."

Leah: "The creative workshop delivered by the research team was such a wonderful way to engage with the community, using a hot air balloon to centre and visualise ideas and including live visual minute taking was totally engaging and a departure from boring notes. It also allows the researcher to re-invest in local artists and caterers."



9. LISTEN AND FULLY ENGAGE WITH THE PRIORITIES THE COMMUNITY SHARE

Mat: "I feel like the way in which the research is designed maximises how much everyone can learn about the needs and priorities of the community – for example, the walking interviews really facilitates honest opinion sharing. It's much easier to give your opinion when walking alongside someone rather than sat opposite them at a desk."

Catherine: "We respect our young participants' priorities by following advice from our young advisors who advised us to use photo-elicitation. This is where photographs taken by participants are used as prompts in a semi-structured interview."



Leah: "I think that designing the map of green activities available in the North East shows how devoted all members of the study are to assisting the local community. The research team have also created a mailing list for green practitioners and often share funding opportunities. Plus, when we realised that RiN was not able to cater to the priorities of younger members of the community due to lack of out of hours contact times, we introduced an after-school club, engaging with the school's needs. That this is an "opt in" club also suggests that it reflects the priorities of the young people who use it."

10. BE RESPONSIVE, COMMUNICATE REGULARLY, FEEDBACK ANY OUTCOMES AND SAY THANK YOU.

Charley: "I think an important part of our communication strategy is to retain face-to-face contact and supplement this with technology. By varying how we retain contact, we can personalise the research and try to reduce the contact burden for practitioners".

Catherine: "We're also careful to keep our communication actively positive and giving. Rather than only getting in touch when we would like to request something; we often contact our partners and stakeholders with training offers and funding opportunities we think may interest them".

Leah: "The research team always uses the most convenient technology for us. Lengthy issues can be discussed online via zoom or in person and regular contact can be kept via email or text. I also felt that I could reach out if I needed to. It adds a lot of warmth to the experience".

