



# NATIONAL LISTENING CAMPAIGN REPORT 2022

Community Organisers in partnership with  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

David Symes, July 2022

**Community  
Organisers**

[www.corganisers.org.uk](http://www.corganisers.org.uk)

**LISTEN  
POWER  
ACTION**

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## National Listening Campaign 2022

The listening campaign surfaced stories and lived experiences from nine communities connected to the Community Organisers network of [Social Action Hubs](#) (SAH) and grassroots organisations. Helping identify common themes and wider issues that are concerning people. The listening conversations will support future mandates for action or change.

The conversations are the starting point for developing the collective solidarity needed to engage with those in positions of power. Ensuring the voices of those seldom heard can influence the policies and processes that affect their lives. The conversations are the catalyst to deeper (more focused) listening exercises, aimed at understanding the root causes of the concerns raised.

By listening to and entering into dialogue with communities, we are constantly seeking to systematically understand the most pressing issues that these people face. We seek to amplify the voices and actions of those in our network to bring about changes in policy or practice.

This report brings together the findings of the Community Organisers National Listening Campaign 2022. It draws on the experiences of diverse communities across nine areas of England.

*“Community organising is the work of bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice. Community organisers reach out and listen, connect, and motivate people to build their collective power” – Community Organisers*

### Where did we listen, who did we listen to and how?

#### Where did we listen?

We utilised our distributed network of community organisers and [Social Action Hubs](#) (SAH) across England. Targeting 9 locations where they could reach diverse communities experiencing a range of intersecting issues.

The organisations and areas that took part in the National listening campaign were:

[All the Small Things](#), Stoke-on-Trent

[English for Action](#), London

[Neresa Heritage & Unity](#), West London

[One Stonegrove](#), Edgware

[Wharton Trust](#), Hartlepool

[Community Roots CIC](#), Gloucestershire

[Little Heroes ASD](#), Southend-on-Sea

[North Birkenhead Development Trust](#), Wirral

[Starting Point](#), Stockport

### Who listened?

We worked with an experienced community organiser from each of the 9 locations. They identified and upskilled local volunteers/leaders, to take part in the National Listening Campaign. Each of the selected areas listened to *circa* 40 members of their community.

The local volunteer/leaders were offered online training in Listening Skills for Community Organising (endorsed by the Quality License Scheme), data protection and safeguarding.

### How did they engage with their community?

Using a community organising approach they engaged in relational conversations in a series of settings including 1-1, group meetings, online events etc. The conversations enabled them to build on their local relationships and help shape a picture of people's lives.

Questions for the relational conversations were agreed through a Listening Campaigns Team (made up of experienced community organisers, local volunteers/leaders) and in partnership with Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

### These questions were:

- What are the good things about where you live [the area]? (What makes you happy, excited, comfortable, contented about where you live?)
- What are the challenges with living in [the area]? (What makes you feel angry, sad, frustrated?)
- Setting a Vision: Thinking about [this area] and what an ideal version of it might be, what would that look like to you?
- Exploring Ideas: What is stopping the vision from being a reality?
- Moving people to Action: Do you feel you could affect decisions that are made in your area? (If not, why not?)
- Moving People to Action: What would you like to do next?

## Key Concerns

### Analysing the Data

The 9 areas involved in the National Listening Campaign were invited to a face-to-face meeting at Stonegrove Community Trust in London to analyse the data gathered from the conversations in each location.

Although we looked at the conversation responses to all the questions, we focus on the question; "*What are the challenges with living in [the area]? (What makes you feel angry, sad, frustrated?)*", at this stage. It is from the responses to this question that we will look to bring people together and build mandates for building strategies and taking action.

You will see from the key findings that a lot of the concerns resonate with broad community sentiment around the rising cost of living, with people expressing difficulties affording life's essentials.

## Key Finding: National Concerns

There were some clear connections with the concerns expressed across the 9 communities that took part in the National Listening Campaign. These included personal safety (fear of crime), mental wellbeing, housing, young people, service provision, and the environment. Many of these concerns interconnect and have a cause and effect on each other.

- **Personal Safety** – crime and the fear of crime featured highly in the conversations. People talked about lack of visible policing and antisocial behaviour being unchallenged. There were observations relating to how individuals were being pushed into criminal acts because of the cost-of-living crisis
- **Mental Wellbeing** – there was talk of anxiety, isolation, loneliness, the need for better connected communities and access to better services and provisions. There is a sense of low esteem and a lack of a sense of belonging
- **Housing** – a wide ranging set of concerns regarding overcrowding, poor living conditions, rogue landlords, lack of investment, high rental prices and their links to the cost-of-living crisis
- **Young People** – low aspirations and a lack of opportunities. They need healthier role models and a belief that they can change themselves and the world around them for the better. To do this they need meaningful education and service support
- **Service Provision** – too many services had been cut or were not as accessible as they had been in the past. This provision is essential for individuals wellbeing
- **Environment** – there was a general feeling that people were taking less care in their environment around them. The loss of the high street, litter, pollution, poor lighting, erosion of open spaces and overcrowding were highlighted as issues

## Key Finding: A feeling of powerlessness to affect change

The conversations highlighted an overwhelming feeling that people felt powerless to affect change in their communities. We asked the question “do you feel you could affect decisions that are made in your area? (If not, why not?)”

*“No - I don't feel confident enough to voice my opinions, but I would be happy to add things to a suggestion box for example” – National Listening Campaign Conversations*

The answers in 7 of 8 areas highlighted that more people felt unable to affect decisions than those that felt they could [Appendix A].

However, the conversations did show an underlying willingness for people to be better involved in their communities, if there were more organised activities and groups. There was also acknowledgment that individuals wanted better information on how they could get involved.

There were many comments where people felt their lone voices would not be heard. There is an overwhelming feeling to the belief a larger number of voices together would have more impact.

The exception to this was in Matson, Gloucester, where the majority of those asked felt that they could affect decisions.

## Further Investigation: Matson, Gloucester

Do you feel you could affect decisions that are made in your area? (If not, why not?)

Matson is a suburb in the City of Gloucester, Gloucestershire. It is part of the Matson, Robinswood, and White City ward, which has a population of approx. 9000 people.

As part of the report, we spoke to community organiser Penny Liddicot (who led the listening campaign in Matson), about why the majority of people felt *they could* affect change in their area.

- Matson has history of community development work in its area. This includes advice services, good links to council/housing services and community development work.
- In the recent council elections Matson moved from Labour to Conservative. The Conservative councillors have been active and visible within the community, and some of them were already well known within their community.
- GL Communities, the charity that employs Penny, have 3 centres in Matson. One is a Social Action Hub, a space where people come together, to be creative, hold family activities and hold community meetings etc. The second is a more 'discreet' building, providing health and wellbeing support to residents young and old and the third offers advocacy and advice and a charity shop to community members.
- Penny started working in the Matson in June 2021. The community have been very open to community organising approaches and have started to understand where power lies in their community and effective ways of negotiating around it.
- By working together, the community have been able to influence decisions concerning local community centres and their activities.
- The residents group is being supported to strengthen their voice and understand the power within the community. Better placing them to be able to influence future regeneration projects that are planned for Matson.
- They have accessed funding for a peer support group for parents of children with additional needs in Matson. A project that came directly from door knocking and listening to residents about their needs. This shows how the community can identify solutions based on their needs, using a community organising approach.

## Reflections on the National Listening Campaign Conversations

It was not unexpected that people's key concerns are the things they see every day from the front doors in their communities. Personal safety (fear of crime), mental wellbeing, housing, young people, service provision, cost-of-living and their environment – were the key concerns from the conversations, that linked all the areas.

The National Listening Campaign conversations are the initial 1:1s. We would like to further develop the relationships and conversations in these areas to understand why people feel powerless to influence change. Continuing with deeper listenings around the concerns that emerged, before starting to bring people together in groups to tackle the underlying issues.

## Recommendations from this Report

The National Listening Campaign findings identified a clear set of recommendations for the Community Organisers network. We should:

- Cultivate inclusive spaces where all people have the genuine opportunity to participate and be heard.
- Develop people's leadership and personal agency to work with others to influence decision makers and act on the issues that matter most to them
- Continue listening to the voices of people in the most challenged, unrepresented, and diverse communities
- Support, promote and invest in the important work of grassroots organisations that are on the front line of community engagement
- Create opportunities for people to share stories and lived experiences to inform policy and process
- Support the personal and professional development of frontline community workers through a recognised training and development programme

## Next Steps

This report will be shared with the Community Organisers Trustees, Social Action Hubs, membership, and staff team. The recommendations in the report will help inform future strategies and direction for the organisation and wider membership.

The 9 areas involved with this National Listening Campaign will use this occasion of reaching out, listening, and connecting with their communities as a catalyst to deeper listenings and relationship building.

We will continue to work with the Community Organisers network to find ways of implementing the recommendations from the report.

## APPENDIX A – Do you feel you can affect decisions in your area?

The table relates to page 5 of this report: Key Finding: A feeling of powerlessness to affect change.

| Do you feel you could affect decisions that are made in your area?<br>(If not, why not?) |                            |   |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| Area   | Majority of people said... | Observations from 1-1 conversation data   |
| Stafford   | No                         | Those that feel they can affect decisions, are already working within or connected to community groups. Those that don't, show a willingness to get involved if there were more organised projects.   |
| Gloucester   | Yes                        | From the listening conversations, it felt like there was a strong sense of community in Matson, with generational connections. They have also had community organising/development practices rooted into the community ( <a href="#">Read more on page 6</a> ). |
| Southend-on-Sea  | No                         | A real feeling that there is no point, and that no one would listen anyway. One individual quoted that they were just 'a voice in a sea of voices'.   |
| Birkenhead   | No                         | Depressing feedback that mentions addiction and drugs as barriers to getting involved. Others spoke of work commitments and long hours being a barrier to engagement.   |
| Stockport  | No                         | You get a feeling that the current work in the community allows people the chance to get involved with neighbourhood groups if they wanted.   |
| London   | No                         | The people that felt they had a say in their community were already connected through accessing their local community hub.  |
| Hartlepool   | No                         | A strong feeling you couldn't affect change on your own and that they would need to be part of larger more organised groups.  |



## APPENDIX B: Feedback from Participating Areas

The 9 areas involved in the National Listening Campaign were invited to a face-to-face meeting at Stonegrove Community Trust in London to analyse the data gathered from the *circa* 40 conversations in each location.

In small groups, key patterns, trends, and priorities from each area were identified.

These priorities will be the starting point for bringing people back together and planning future actions, holding deeper listenings on the issues, and identifying potential community projects.

### What are the challenges with living in [the area]? (What makes you feel angry, sad, frustrated?)

#### All the Small Things

All the Small Things (AtST) is a Community Interest Company based in Stoke-on-Trent, North Staffordshire that works with community members, community leaders, and professionals to support and engage communities. Find out more about All the Small Things [here](#).

The conversations took place in Shelton and Fegg Hayes, Stafford

- **Environment** – better care of their environment. Tidier, cleaner spaces for people to enjoy.
- **Affordability** – the cost of living has affected people. They are struggling to make ends meet.
- **Crime** – a better emphasis on crime in the area. It is creating community tensions. Anti-social behaviours. We would like to see less drug dependency and improved services to support those with addiction.
- **Community spirit** – a return to the community spirit shown during the pandemic. People are still isolated and affected.

*“Respect has gone. There are low aspirations, and the cost of living is becoming a worry” – All the Small Things, Shelton and Fegg Hayes, conversations.*

#### Community Roots CIC

Community Roots (CIC) was formed as a vehicle to keep community organising alive in Gloucestershire. Community Roots CIC is a relationship-based organisation, with no agenda except that of the residents that it listens to. Find out more about Community Roots CIC [here](#).

The conversations took place in Matson, Gloucester

- **Community wellbeing** – neighbourliness, health provision, community spirit.
- **Improved facilities** – improved variety of shops, more parking, better bus service.
- **Green Spaces** – clean up litter, replace benches, invest in parks, and open spaces.

- **Community safety** – antisocial behaviour, improved lighting, reduce traffic speed, improve children and young people’s safety.

*“When I moved to Matson, I didn’t know what to expect as it had a bad reputation, the actual reality of living here is nice”  
– Community Roots, Matson conversations.*

#### English for Action

English for Action (EFA) provide accessible, participatory, and empowering English language classes for migrants in London. Campaigning on issues affecting migrants and supporting their students to speak up on issues that impact them.

The conversations formed part of a wider listening campaign within EFA. They took place ‘in-person’ in Brent London, with 45-50 of the students over a five-month period leading up to the local elections in May 2022. Find out more about English for Action [here](#).

- **Inadequate career development** – inadequate support to translate professional backgrounds into well-paid work.
- **Responsibility and representation** – migrant communities, especially asylum seekers, are not seen as citizens.
- **Care Sector** – Poor pay and conditions in social care where many migrant women work.

*“I’ve been thinking of joining a political party. I like politics, I want to understand the system, to help make change” –  
English for Action, Brent Conversations*

#### Little Heroes ASD

Little Heroes ASD Support Group in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, is a parent led support group for families of children who are on the autistic spectrum.

Their conversations were primarily held with parents of the children that attend the support group. Find out more about Little Heroes ASD [here](#).

- **Community safety** – the termination of youth and family services has made our area feel more unsafe.
- **User-friendliness** – our families want to see better access for disabled people including roads, busses, and parking.
- **Support for disability** – the cost-of-living crisis has made Special Educational Needs sessions more difficult to attend/afford.
- **Demise of the high street** – investment needed and a more connected council.

*“There is a lack of awareness of safety for Autistic children and a lack of funding for children with needs” – Little Heroes, Southend on Sea, conversations.*

### Nerese Heritage & Unity

A newly formed organisation in West London that is passionately engaged in community dialogue through building power, mobilisation and personalising history through genealogy & community organising. Find out more about Nerese Heritage and Unity [here](#).

- **Tackle crime** – a better criminal justice system, closer community policing, better collaborative work with local health systems.
- **Housing** – more affordable housing, stricter control on landlords and living conditions.
- **Climate change** – better emphasis on tackling pollution and the causes of climate change and to better access and work with local groups to develop strategies.
- **Mental health** – increase aspirations, better access to services, and tackle isolation.

*“Housing is a real concern. Rental for private landlords is high, the living conditions poor and the council don’t invest in their properties” – Nerese Heritage and Unity, West London, conversations.*

### North Birkenhead Development Trust (NBDT)

North Birkenhead Development Trust in Wirral is committed to activating the power in their local community. Working in one of the most socio-economically deprived areas in the UK, they bring expertise in organising in the face of austerity. They work with people to organise around not only their personal goals, but how their challenges, experiences, and stories can change the world for others. Find out more about the North Birkenhead Development Trust [here](#).

- **Lack of opportunities** – young people are in a cycle of hopelessness, and this can lead to crime and drug taking. Low aspirations.
- **Housing** – housing is unaffordable to most in our area. High rents, high mortgage prices mean more people are pushed into poverty.
- **Access to services** – more and more put onto the voluntary/charity sector to solve deep lying issues in society. There is a mental health pandemic.
- **Community safety** – a general feeling of unease and fear. People are doing whatever they can to get by.

*“There is a massive disconnect between older and younger generations.” – NBDT, Birkenhead conversations.*

### One Stonegrove

One Stonegrove in Edgware, Greater London, has a vision to create a sustainable joint community and church centre, as the social and cultural hub of their community. It strives to be recognised and valued by residents. Breaking down barriers of social and community integration, effectively reducing social isolation and promoting wellbeing. Find out more about One Stonegrove [here](#).

- **Building** – there is lots of new building happening yet there is much less community spirit.
- **Activities** – more activities for older people. Especially after the pandemic. Many are feeling alone and isolated.
- **Place and space** – we need more outside spaces that are safe for children to play, less erosion of green spaces. More pride in our area to tackle fly tipping and littering.
- **Busy lives** – the cost of living means we are working longer hours to make ends meet. This means we have less time to donate to our communities.

*“The redevelopment of Stonegrove has weakened the sense of community. It feels overcrowded with less facilities and outside spaces than promised” – One Stonegrove, Greater London, conversations.*

### Starting Point

Starting Point in Woodley, Stockport, is an award-winning Community Learning Partnership and coffee shop established in 2009 after listening to local needs. It runs numerous projects supporting local people’s needs including Community Organising, Digital Learning, Digital Lending Library, Wellbeing and Youth Work. Find out more about Starting point [here](#).

- **Loneliness and isolation** – a need for better connections and relationships and places to bring people together.
- **Crime/drugs/antisocial behaviour** – better more accessible services are needed to support young people.
- **Mental health** – there is a lack of government investment at the local and national levels. The need to understand the root causes.
- **Lack of youth activities and spaces** – we desperately need more investment in youth services and community activities for young people.

*“Local businesses often don't succeed or don't get the support they need from residents and Council. Many people complain about the area but won't get involved to help” – Starting Point, Stockport, conversations.*

### Wharton Trust

The Annexe is a Community & Resource Centre run by the Wharton Trust in the Dyke House area of Hartlepool. They provide families with opportunities that help them to improve their lives, develop skills and increase their confidence. They hope that the result will be gainful employment. Find out more about the Wharton Trust and The Annexe [here](#).

- **Children** – safer spaces to play, better parental support and education.
- **Crime** – we need more visible policing, there is too much crime.
- **Cleaner environment** – dogs mess is an issue, streets need to be kept cleaner, residents need to take a healthier interest and respect their neighbourhood more.
- **Green spaces** – more green spaces, less development.
- **Cost of living** – lower energy prices.
- **Hosing/Landlords** – There are lots of empty houses and areas that feel neglected by the council, yet they continue to build new properties. This makes the existing residents feel like they don't matter.

*“Why don't we get the existing housing right, before we start building new ones?” – Wharton Trust, Dyke House conversations.*

