

Assessing the impact of participation in People's Health Trust programmes

Key findings (Wave 1)

May 2022



About this report

This summary report describes the findings of the first wave of research assessing the impact of participation in the People's Health Trust's Local Conversations and Active Communities programmes.

More about this research is on our website, http://www.social-life.co/project/peoples_health_trust/

The research was commissioned by People's Health Trust. The aim was to examine the ways in which community-led projects are building social connections and collective control to improve health and wellbeing. We would like to thank the project participants and practitioners who shared their knowledge, hopes and worries with us. We appreciate their expertise and the time they put into this work and hope the report will provide useful insight.

The report was written and published by Social Life (text by Dr Olimpia Mosteanu, statistical modelling by Alix Naylor and design by Lavanya Kumaran).

Research team: Nicola Bacon, Jessica Gatta, Lavanya Kumaran, Olimpia Mosteanu, Alix Naylor, and Jonah Rudlin.

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

www.social-life.co @SL_Cities

People's Health Trust is a charity addressing health inequalities in England, Scotland and Wales. We work to ensure that where you live does not unfairly reduce the length of your life, or the quality of your health. Our work focuses on:

- Funding and support for communities
- Using our evidence and learning to influence change locally and nationally
- Working with our networks of funded partners to offer support, shape our programmes and policy, and ensure their voices are well represented with decision-makers.

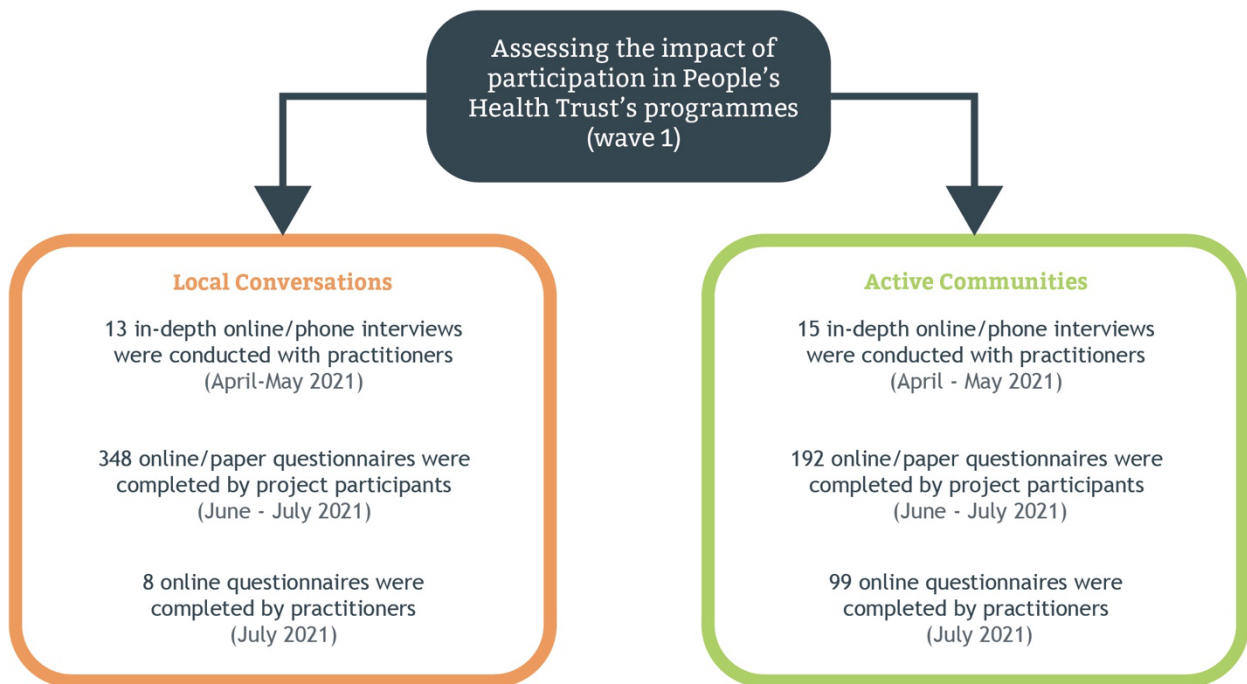
www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk @Peoples_health

This research assesses the impact of participation in the People’s Health Trust’s Local Conversations and Active Communities programmes. Building on People’s Health Trust’s theory of change, it aims to understand the role of the two programmes in addressing the social determinants of health.

The research uses a **place-based approach** to answer three interrelated research questions:

- (1) how do practitioners evaluate the progress of each programme in relation to key elements of the theory of change?
- (2) what is the effect of participation in the Trust’s programmes on local people?
- (3) what is the role of local contexts in supporting or hampering positive outcomes for individuals and communities?

The first wave of data gathering took place between April and July 2021 against the complicated background of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its social and economic impacts. The second phase of research will take place in March 2022, and the last phase in October 2022.



Data from the first wave gives us a preliminary insight into the impact of programme efficacy, as well as demographic, economic and geographic factors on change in health equality. The report starts with a brief outline of shorter term changes brought about by participation in the two programmes. Then it turns to a discussion about community power and its impact on longer term changes.

To understand the impact of the two programmes, responses from surveyed participants were compared to aggregate data for people living in either 20% or 30% most deprived communities in the UK (different nationally available surveys focus on different geographies). The report refers to these comparative geographies as areas characterised by high levels of deprivation.

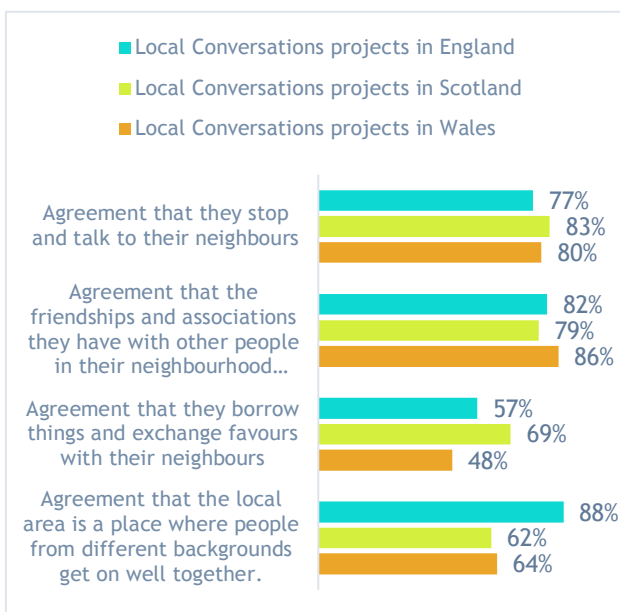
Shorter term changes

- The projects funded through People’s Health Trust projects had an **impact on participants’ confidence**. Over 70% of surveyed participants in each programme reported that the projects helped them to feel more confident.
- By allowing people to come together and join a range of activities, projects **impacted positively on participants’ skills**. 76% of the surveyed participants involved in Active Communities projects and 69%

of those involved in Local Conversations projects responded that they had learnt or developed new skills through the project.

- Participation in local projects had a **positive impact on participants’ social networks**, allowing participants to expand their social links and ties. 91% of surveyed Active Communities project participants and 86% of the Local Conversations participants said they made new friends by taking part in project activities.
- Overall, surveyed participants from both programmes had **more positive perceptions of social connectedness** than people living in areas characterised by high levels of disadvantage.
 - 75% of those surveyed agreed that they stop and talk to their neighbours, compared to 57% of the people living in areas characterised by high levels of disadvantage.
 - 83% of respondents agreed that the friendships and associations they have with other people in their neighbourhood mean a lot to them, compared to 49% of the people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.
 - 55% of those surveyed agreed that they borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours, compared to 32% of the people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.
 - 80% of respondents agreed that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, compared to 70% of the people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.

Local Conversations - across projects:	Active Communities - across projects:
78% of those surveyed agreed that they stop and talk to their neighbours	68% of those surveyed agreed that they stop and talk to their neighbours
83% of respondents agreed that the friendships and associations they have with other people in their neighbourhood mean a lot to them	82% of respondents agreed that the friendships and associations they have with other people in their neighbourhood mean a lot to them
56% of those surveyed agreed that they borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours	54% of those surveyed agreed that they borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours
79% of respondents agreed that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.	83% of respondents agreed that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.

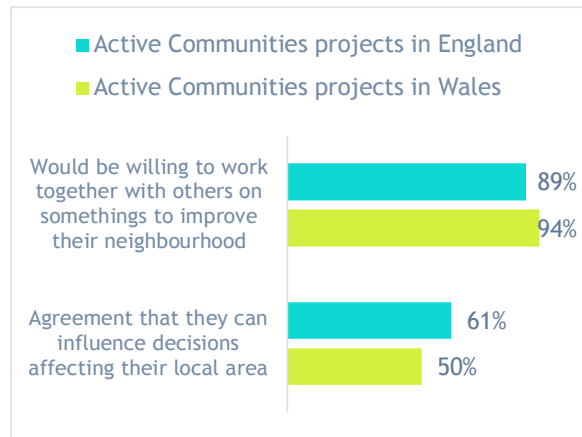
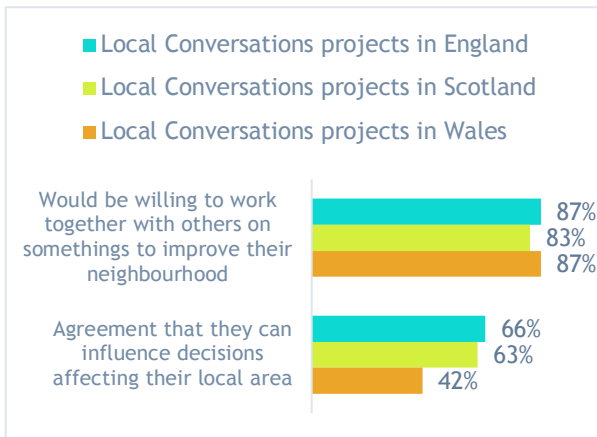


NOTE: The sample of participants in Active Communities projects based in Scotland is very small so the data is not included.

Achieving community power and its impact on longer term changes

- The projects funded through People’s Health Trust had a **positive impact on collective action and community power**. The initial findings show that **stronger social networks, improved confidence and skills and more cohesive communities** have a positive impact on **experience of community power**.
- 73% of the surveyed Active Communities participants and 76% of the Local Conversations participants said they had become more involved in wider community action as a result of participating in the project.
- Across the two programmes, **improved experience of community power** had a positive impact on the **wellbeing and health** of project participants.
- Overall, surveyed participants from both programmes had **more positive perceptions of community power** than people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.
 - 87% of those surveyed agreed that they would be willing to work together with others on something to improve their neighbourhood, compared to 59% of the people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.
 - 59% of those surveyed agreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, compared to 22% of the people living in areas with high levels of disadvantage.

Local Conversations - across projects:	Active Communities - across projects:
86% of those surveyed agreed that they would be willing to work together with others on somethings to improve their neighbourhood	88% of those surveyed agreed that they would be willing to work together with others on somethings to improve their neighbourhood
59% those surveyed agreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area	59% those surveyed agreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area



NOTE: The sample of participants in Active Communities projects based in Scotland is very small so the data is not included.

- The projects **created opportunities for new collaborations**, gradually supporting scalability and sustainability of actions and activities. 86% of the surveyed Local Conversations practitioners and 66% of those working on the Active Communities programme reported that the projects have facilitated new partnerships between local projects/organisations with common goals/interest.
- Overall, **the programmes are making a difference in people’s lives**. When asked whether they felt that being involved in the projects made a difference in their lives, Local Conversations participants mentioned that the projects impacted positively on their networks (41%) and collective action (29%). Active Communities participants remarked that projects had a positive impact on their social links and ties (42%), and that they played a key role in improving their sense of community (21%).

“The project made a difference in my life. [It] made me aware of issues and needs in [the] community and gives us the tools to try and improve and involve with the local community, [I] made new friends.” (Local Conversations project participant)

“Honestly [it is] one of the best things I’ve ever done, I’ve grown so much through seeing what is possible through community organising and [I’ve] built really special bonds with so many different people in my community.” (Active Communities project participant)

The role played by local contexts in shaping the effectiveness of local projects

- At a personal level, the key impacts of **local contexts are associated with job opportunities, decent and affordable housing, and the availability and accessibility of local services and facilities**. These are issues that not only motivated some of the surveyed participants to get involved in the projects funded through People’s Health Trust but also impacted their involvement journey. At times, these issues hampered participants’ engagement; at other times, they motivated people to continue attending project activities.
- At the community level, **local contexts can both support and limit effectiveness of local projects** - social connectedness, trust, safety and institutional racism were all mentioned as key factors in shaping local projects by project participants and practitioners from both programmes.
- Across the two programmes, the majority of those surveyed got involved in the projects funded through People’s Health Trust because of a **combination of individual and community-driven motivations**.
 - 54% of Active Communities respondents and 49% of Local Conversations respondents were motivated by the desire to meet new people.
 - 41% of Active Communities respondents and 54% of Local Conversations respondents said they wanted to help their community.
 - 23% of Active Communities respondents and 34% of Local Conversations respondents got involved because they wanted to improve local services.
- Active Communities practitioners noted that **the uncertainty about the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased hardship for residents due to the pandemic** were major barriers to projects returning to normal operations after more than a year of pandemic restrictions.
- Local Conversations project leads listed **the uncertainty about the pandemic, limited access to spaces to meet in-person, difficulty to carry out outreach and engagement, and changes in the community** as equally difficult challenges moving forward.
- Practitioners from both programmes agreed that **achieving a positive impact on individual participants and communities alike takes time and requires a creative approach**. Local Conversations leads flagged that supporting collective action and building partnerships were key long-term goals that take time and perseverance, especially as we emerge from the pandemic. For practitioners involved in the Active Communities projects, the major issue moving forward is finding the right balance between capacity building and ensuring the sustainability of actions that build on the improved social links in and outside the Active Communities projects.

“[Now] we are ready to [influence organisations with the power to support change locally]. We won’t just sit and say ‘yes, if that’s what should be done, sure’. Now [project participants] are poised to have their own voice: ‘this is our lived experience; this is how we want to work with you and achieve this’.” (Local Conversations practitioner)

“The strengths come from the community that has organised the group - it comes from the participation - members have a vested interest in the project and they feel empowered - it’s an equal partnership.” (Active Communities practitioner)

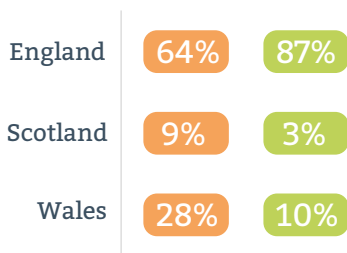
Profiles of project participants who took part in the survey (Wave 1)

The first wave of research took place against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts. At that time, the local communities and people that the research engaged were dealing with complex challenges, as well as anxieties about COVID-19, physical distancing and other restrictions. The first wave of research managed to engage people from a range of backgrounds, relying both on online and paper surveys. However, the sample of participants was impacted by their general availability to take part in research during such difficult times.

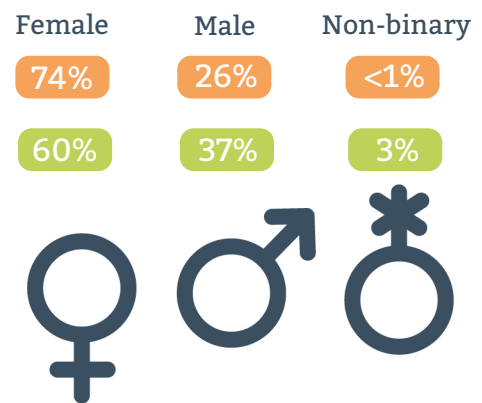
Local Conversations
of project participants surveyed | **348**

Active Communities
of project participants surveyed | **192**

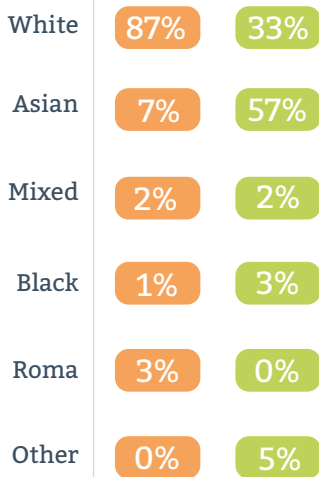
UK Countries



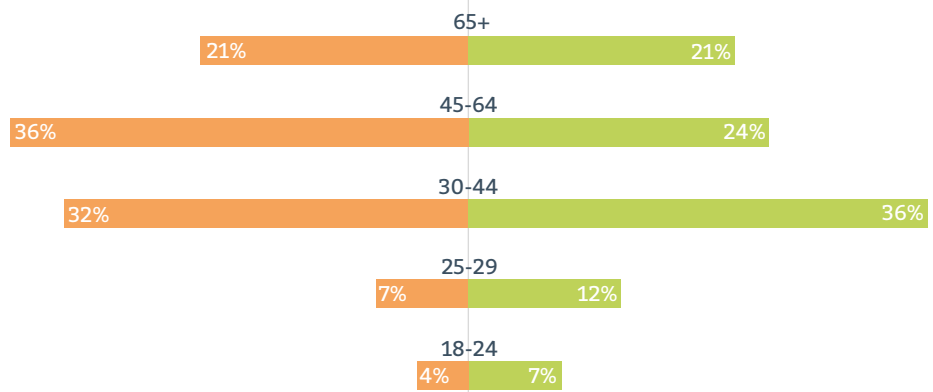
Gender



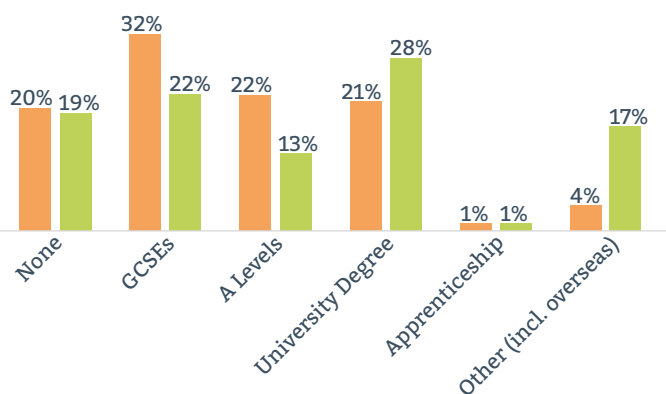
Ethnicity



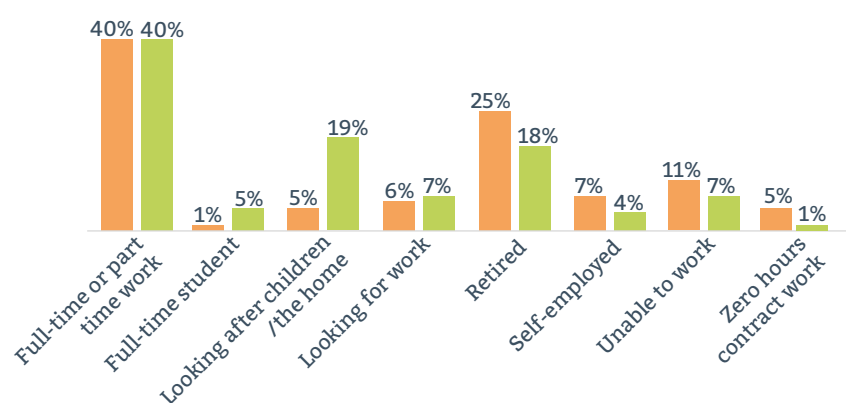
Age



Qualifications



Employment



Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

www.social-life.co @SL_Cities

People's Health Trust is a charity addressing health inequalities in England, Scotland and Wales. We work to ensure that where you live does not unfairly reduce the length of your life, or the quality of your health. Our work focuses on:

- Funding and support for communities
- Using our evidence and learning to influence change locally and nationally
- Working with our networks of funded partners to offer support, shape our programmes and policy, and ensure their voices are well represented with decision-makers.

www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk @Peoples_health

Registered Charity number England and Wales:1125537 Scotland: SC039848

Report commissioned by People's Health Trust and published by Social Life.

