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Connected Communities Newsletter October 2023

Hello,

Welcome to the latest instalment of Staffordshire University's Connected Communities Newsletter.

This newsletter looks at all the different events, and projects happening between communities and the University.

- Connected Communities Team

connectedcommunities@staffs.ac.uk

Staffordshire University Community Advisory Network (Staffs CAN)



Staffs CAN is Staffordshire University's Community Advisory Network, which brings together people from across Staffordshire to talk about the things that matter to them.

On Tuesday 3rd October we held the third #StaffsCAN of 2023!

This Staffs CAN focused on the evaluation report that is being made to show the different community activities that Staffordshire University is either putting on or engaging with.

In 2022-23, Staffordshire University piloted the Connected Communities Evaluation Framework. Any social, community or cultural university events intended for members of the public have been evaluated in this report. This includes things like Staffs CAN, Public Research activities, and Exhibitions.

People that came to Staffs CAN told us about the strengths of the information, the areas to improve and things that we should look to add or change when we do this work again in 2024.

The final evaluation report will be available in the coming months and will be shared via our newsletter, website (coming soon!), and social media channels.

Want to find out more about Staffs CAN?

-mail connectedcommunities@staffs.ac.uk

Action on Poverty Conference 2023



On Monday 18th and Tuesday 19th September Staffordshire University hosted the second annual Action on Poverty conference at their Stoke-on-Trent campus.

The two-day conference welcomed people from across the country to attend and discuss the work that they have been doing to combat poverty, hardship, and destitution in the communities that they live and work.

The opening night of the conference connected attendees with Professor Mona Fouad, via live link to the USA, to discuss poverty challenges facing Birmingham, Alabama. The evening finished with a panel discussion about Racism, Asylum Seeking and Associated Poverty Issues in the UK.

The second day of the conference provided lots of different conversations and workshops for attendees to get involved with, including '*The History of UK Poverty*', '*The Importance of Place-based Approaches*', and '*The Roadmap to end the need for Foodbanks*'. The

Staffordshire University Participatory Action Research Programme



Staffordshire University's PAR Programme supports researchers and staff from the university to work with communities in participatory ways.

Throughout the year The Connected Communities Team have worked with staff, researchers and students from across the university to support them in how they can work in participatory ways with communities.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) programme provides staff, students and researchers from the university with resources & time to develop their skills and confidence to engage with communities on participatory research projects.

The programme aims to continue to build a culture for working in participation with communities on research and embed this across the university by providing new opportunities for staff.

Earlier this month we launched the second year of the programme which will start at the end of the year. At the launch staff from the first cohort of the programme shared updates from their projects with potential applicants to the second cohort.

Shaping how universities can be 'Truly Civic'

Staffordshire University has been selected to take part in a programme to accelerate the impact it is having in its community.

The National Civic Impact Accelerator Action Learning Programme (NCIAALP) will see 12 civic university partnerships working together to address challenges in developing civic engagement and co-creating innovative solutions. Staffordshire University is doing this work with members of the community and community organisations.

You can read more about this [here](#).

Visit to Birmingham



On Thursday 14th September staff from the university joined community members to attend the NCIA Action Learning Day in Birmingham. During the day the Staffordshire based partnership worked alongside other community members, organisations and universities, from across the country, to talk about the things that make something 'Truly Civic'.

Graduate Interns



Since the start of September, the Connected Communities team has been joined by two graduate interns for a 140-hour placement. Alex and Jasmyn are using their creative expertise to help create engaging materials that the Connected Communities team can use to inform and engage with communities.

Alex

I'm a Graduate Animator who dabbles in a bit of everything 3D but the main focus is character animation .

My role is to help spread what PAR is and help explain in a way that can reach as many people as possible with my ideas. I've gone through different stages so far including storyboarding to modelling, rigging and finery animating and I've been experimenting with Blender's Grease pencil tool for a blended 2D and 3D look.

I have recently been exploring sculpting in blender and working on my character modelling so to improve and upgrade my understanding animation

Jasmyn

As part of an internship as the Connected Communities Artist, I have been designing and creating giant interactive boardgame that allows players to physically move around the board. The game is being created for the purpose of making research more fun and engaging for participants involved. The idea behind making research more creative.

The game is a part of place-based research therefore I have designed a map-based game based in and around Stoke-on-Trent. The game is both equally fun for players but useful for research purposes. The game should make for an interesting tool for research purposes.

Community Spotlight: MPFT Digital Training



Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) Digital team have teamed up with the Digital Poverty Alliance to provide Staffordshire communities with digital skills training.

Throughout September they have delivered sessions across Staffordshire, including; Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Telford.

MPFT Digital Training Team also hosts training sessions at Rising Brook Library in Stafford every Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. These training sessions are free to anyone in the community, there is no sign-up required and you can drop in anytime.

MPFT Digital is hoping to expand the locations of their training sessions in future. To stay up to date with new training sessions you can follow them on social media or visit their website.

Community Spotlight: Windmills Bereavement Charity



Windmills is a charity that provides expert, supportive one-to-one care that helps children and young people experiencing the imminent or recent death of a loved one, to find a caring and positive pathway through their grieving, which enables strong, loving and sustaining memories to be built, and death's impacts to be managed and appeased.

Our Specialist Acute Bereavement Practitioners provide direct, caring months/weeks/days/ hours leading up to a loved one's death, or helping the child through the grieving time after the death.

Facing the sudden reality or news of the death of such a loved one can be deeply traumatic and disorientating for the surviving child. Often the response is a cauldron of confusion and emotions; anger, disbelief, guilt, anguish, withdrawal, detachment and numbing fears for all that is yet to come. Without expert and trusted care and support, such responses can irrevocably scar and derail a young person's life and outlook and negatively shape their relationships, not only with death itself, but with life and living, themselves, their family, and their friends and the wider community.

Families can often feel uncomfortable talking about death with their children and the subject can become taboo, leaving the child even more confused and uninformed. This lack of communication with the child can be the opposite of what's best for them, not talking about important issues and events can be more harmful than talking about them. When children are excluded from such difficult conversations they will begin to shape and imagine all manner of misinterpretations and unfounded thoughts as to why the death occurred or why it is happening.

It is a direct, caring, unique and much-needed service that helps children and young people through grieving times and helps keep their departed loved ones close and their new-made fond memories even closer.

www.windmillscharity.org

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Community Spotlight: Reaching North Staffs



Reaching North Staffs is a non-profit organisation that supports vulnerable and disabled adults across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire to improve their physical, emotional and financial health and wellbeing.

Reaching started out in April 2021 as a Local Authority funded project working as part of a local charity and delivering outreach support to people struggling issues such as with social isolation and mental health. When funding came to an end, the team, led by founder and CEO Georgina Salt decided to continue their work and establish as a CIC in its own right.



“Our free services have grown from a dedicated outreach programme to include a housing and benefits clinic and group support in multiple locations across the city. We also offer bespoke paid-for packages of support for people with longer term needs, as well as delivering a vital service, Recovering Homes that works with people with Hoarding Disorder. Our work reaches a ‘hidden community’ of people needing support. Since our launch in April 2023, referrals for our services have been increasing and we are now operating a waiting list across all our programmes.

Reaching CIC is incredibly proud of how far we have come in such a short space of time - we have received referrals for over 125 individuals since April 2023. We have been awarded 10 grants to help with the cost of running provision. We have raised over £13,000 in donations and sponsorships, including an epic climb up Snowdon with around 40 supporters.

The team is expanding, and we are looking for support from local businesses, organisations and individuals who can help with funding and fundraising to support our vital work. We are developing valuable connections in local communities: all our groups take place in independent café’s, which means our clients can access these venues when our service is closed, and we are in turn supporting small, local business.

We are also looking for volunteers who could donate time or skills to support with our group activities – no matter what your skill set, we can find a role for you!”

You can find out more information about Reaching North Staffs and their services by emailing info@reaching.org.uk, visiting their website, www.reaching.org.uk, or call us on 07851 091862.

International Collaboration in Chengdu



Recently, Staffordshire University Professor, [Gill Forrester](#), has led Staffordshire University's Institute of Education (IoE) online collaboration with the Chengdu Education Centre for International Exchanges (CECIE) to support the development of English language skills in Chengdu primary schools.

The project is based off the idea that learning another language promotes cultural understanding and empathy between different cultures. From this project a manual was made to share some of the learning.

In October 2023 Gill will be visiting Chengdu to work with the education centre on some face-to-face research.

Community Spotlight



Do you want to shine a spotlight on the things that you, your community, or your organisation do?

We're looking for community contributions towards future instalments of the newsletter, to amplify the voices of our community.

For more information please contact connectedcommunities@staffs.ac.uk

Vacancies



[View all the latest work vacancies at Staffordshire University](#)

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