



You, Me and Us Committee: Evidencing Strengths-Based Community-Led Social Action

Authors:

Ben Jessop (University of Hull, YPIP Team)
Joe Cook (University of Hull, YPIP Team)
Katy Adams (University of Hull, YPIP Team)
You, Me and Us Committee

Supported by:

The YPIP Community Panel

Summer 2026

Executive Summary



Introduction

This report presents an analysis of the You, Me and Us Committee (YMU)'s ways of working, examining whether and how they support and grow community capacity, agency and voice. This research acts as a small-scale pilot study which offers insights into the work of YMU and the value it brings to the members and the residents in Shirecliffe, Sheffield. It is one of six Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) demonstrator project reports which will form a comparative report, widening the evidence base and learning to include findings about a diverse set of VCFS organisations.

Prior to this study, the research team connected with Professor Sally Pearse at Sheffield Hallam University, who introduced them to YMU as an example of community-led social-action, working to support their community and address gaps in service and community sector provision.

The research was undertaken between August and November 2025, focusing on qualitative methods. Working co-productively with YMU, the research team sought to understand the outcomes and impacts of their way of working identifiable at individual and community levels. The findings are based on the perspectives of group members and a community stakeholder who has been key to supporting their development.

Key Findings

Ways of working

- By treating people as individuals, YMU fosters an environment of honest, open communication that is person-centred and allows people to be themselves and to open up more readily.
- Key to supporting the local community is YMU's creation of a friendly, consistent person-centred and welcoming community space, where local residents feel supported and not alone.
- YMU uses shared lived experience to remove the fear of judgement or shame, creating a safe space that builds deep trust and honesty.
- By offering a pressure-free environment with no referrals or subscriptions, the group respects people's freedom to come and go as they please, seeking help on their own terms.
- By growing personal agency and confidence, the group enables one another to speak up about the needs of their area to other stakeholders.
- In encouraging one another to take on training and new skills, the group helps members boost their future prospects and find a stronger voice for themselves and their families.

At the community level for local residents

- YMU brings different cultures and faiths together in a shared space, helping people overcome fears and language barriers to find real friendship and connection, boosting community cohesion.
- By stepping in where mainstream services have withdrawn, the group acts as a vital safety net that provides support that is friendly, human and empathetic.
- By designing social trips and affordable foodbags, YMU addresses parent's worries about food poverty, as well as offering local children access to activities and experiences they may not have had otherwise.
- In providing a safe space to share that is built on trust and shared lives the group supports the community's mental health, and provides practical support with daily life.
- By reclaiming local assets like Bishopholme, YMU strengthens the area by giving the community a permanent hub they truly own and feel proud of.

Outcomes and impacts

At the individual level for YMU committee members

- YMU builds self-belief and pride, helping members to find a sense of purpose and the courage to lead and enact change for themselves and others.
- In creating a 'chosen family', the group breaks down social isolation through developing a support network that gives members confidence that they have non-judgemental support and know where to turn.

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations were co-developed with the You, Me and Us committee. They are informed by this report as well as wider research undertaken by Hallam University and Save the Children around multiple insecurities (Tunstall et al., 2025), including a visual on ‘What helps’ (available on page 64 of the [report](#)).

- Be flexible and responsive in how you engage communities, prioritising community-embedded and community-informed approaches and recognising the insight and value they bring.** Social action comes from communities with vested interests and local knowledge. It is vital to support social action by responding to what communities identify they need without imposing other priorities or structures, or subsuming them under these agendas. This involves adapting policy and research agendas and being open to how they can be a better fit with or be more responsive to community led-values and objectives.
- Funding frameworks should aim to support core operational work and long-term organisational capacity.** There are significant gains to be made from funding locally available support mechanisms/infrastructure which can build community capacity and know-how and enable small-scale community groups to take the next step to becoming sustainable community organisations. For example, wrap around infrastructural support that enables organisations to meet delivery regulations attached to funding, developing payroll skills to be able to employ local people, etc.
- Provide micro-grants to enable community groups to grow their capacity to respond to and address unmet need.** This involves being flexible and responsive in funding access and opportunities. Current funding structures with complex applications and short timeframes restrict smaller or more informal social action groups from accessing support. Simpler, more flexible approaches can enable timely, locally relevant action.
- Invest in community asset ownership to give organisations a stable foundation from which to plan and deliver long-term, place-based support.** You, Me and Us demonstrates the importance of locally embedded assets that provide a consistent and welcoming place to seek support, feel proud of, and bring diverse people together. Equally, their physical presence in the community enables rapid mobilisation, providing a vital safety net where mainstream services are withdrawn. Community asset ownership helps make this support more sustainable by reducing financial strain and enabling organisations to make concrete plans for the future.

Introduction & Background

This research was part of the UKRI/ESRC funded Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership's (YPIP) Communities in their Places programme of community demonstrators research. This phase of YPIP is designed to work in partnership with place-based Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) organisations. The research enables VCFS organisations to develop more effective evidence capture tools which are better suited to demonstrating the impact of strengths-based community action. Together, partner organisations and the research team have co-developed data gathering tools, which partners have subsequently utilised. The research team has also conducted research data gathering to supplement findings and provide lived experience insights into understanding and evidencing the ways in which partners work in a community-led or community-partnered manner. This research forms part of six VCFS demonstrator projects which will be summarised in a publicly available report later in 2026.

Prior to this study, the research team connected with Professor Sally Pearse at Sheffield Hallam University who introduced the You, Me and Us Committee (YMU) as an example of community-led social-action, working to support their community where gaps in service and community provision exist.



About the You, Me & Us (YMU) Committee

YMU is a Community Interest Company based in the Shirecliffe area of Sheffield. They work to bring the community together, and are supported by Save The Children. They are volunteer-led and focus their work on supporting their local community. The members are led by community need, and prioritise helping other residents in respect of food poverty, parenting and mental health. They do this via providing a safe, warm and open space in the form of their building, Bishopholme, supporting families through a low cost food parcel club, and being a reliable presence in the community.

About the research aims and methods

The researchers spent time listening to the YMU members to better understand their values, activities, motivations and the community they serve. These conversations shaped the focus and design of this co-designed pilot study.

The research draws on Participatory Action Research Methodology which embeds working with research stakeholders to produce outputs that are defined by, and valuable to, all stakeholders. The research design also draws on the team's strengths-based evidence approach (Buchell, et al., 2026; Cook, et al., 2024) in order to capture outcomes and impacts of YMU's work at individual, community and service system levels.

The resulting research is co-designed and co-owned by YMU to utilise as they wish.

Primary data gathering was undertaken between August and November 2025 and included:

- Six interviews with key members of YMU.
- A focus group with seven members of YMU.
- An interview with a locally embedded VCFS stakeholder who supports their work.

Members of YMU were compensated for their time and contribution with vouchers.

Secondary data gathering was undertaken in November 2025 and included:

- An analysis of individual case studies on the core members of YMU from work undertaken at Meadows Nursery.

The report is structured as follows:

Chapter One discusses the origin and context of YMU. Chapter Two and Three present the experiences of group members, with Chapter Two examining their personal context journeys and Chapter Three detailing how they work with one another and the community. Chapter Four discusses the group's understanding of the outcomes and impacts they create for both the group committee members and their wider community. The final Chapter Five discusses the group's hopes for the future and summarises key learning for policy and practice.

Throughout the report, the analysis considers all stages of YMU's journey, from the original support at Meadows Nursery, through to their current independent work.

The research was co-designed with YMU to understand their values, activities, motivations and the community they serve.

Contents

Page

03

**Executive
Summary**

06

**Introduction
and Background**

08

Chapter One:
The evolution of
the You, Me and
Us Committee

15

Chapter Two:
Personal Values,
Life & Community
Context

21

Chapter Three:
You, Me and Us
Ways of Working

27

Chapter Four:
Experienced
Outcomes

37

Chapter Five:
Looking Towards
The Future

42

**Summary of
Insights and
Policy/Practice**

43

**Bibliography and
Appendix**

Chapter 1:

The evolution of the You, Me and Us Committee and situating their work in Shirecliffe

Introduction

This chapter explores the socio-economic context of Shirecliffe, Sheffield where You, Me and Us (YMU) is situated and then discusses the origins and development of YMU. It outlines the committee's transition from a co-designed research project at Meadows Nursery to an independent community-led organisation.

Contextualising Shirecliffe, the needs of the community and the need for YMU

The formation of YMU and the focus of the group's work/activities are a direct result of the gaps in service and community provision in Shirecliffe. It is therefore important to understand the context in which they have come together and what pressures the community faces in order to help situate the work and activities of YMU. In response, this section reviews the levels of deprivation, general health and access to available support at community level in Shirecliffe.

Contextualising Data Sources and Limitations

This section uses data from reliable sources including the 2021 census data (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022); English Indices of Deprivation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], 2025); and the annual Energy

Consumption in the UK report (ECUK) (Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero, 2025).

Shirecliffe sits in the Burngreave ward of Sheffield. Whilst the ONS allows for a profile of the Burngreave Ward, it does not readily produce one specifically for Shirecliffe. As such, a custom-drawn area profile was developed for the census data using the Shirecliffe boundaries on OpenStreetMap, a crowdsourced, open access dataset which is built from GPS traces and licensed government data sources. Overall, there were limited differences between Burngreave as a whole and Shirecliffe in the census data. Some data sources only profiled the Burngreave ward and where this was the case it is explicitly stated. Where statistical data allows, contrasts have been made against the national average.

According to the English Indices of Deprivation which measures the relative levels of deprivation across small areas by measuring multiple aspects of disadvantage, Shirecliffe is in the most deprived 10% of areas in the UK and one of the five most deprived wards in Sheffield, with corresponding implications for poverty, deprivation and health. This review considers these two aspects before considering available support in the area.

Poverty and deprivation

Household deprivation in Shirecliffe is considerably higher than the national average, with only 30.8% of the residents not being deprived in any dimension, compared to the national average of 48.4%. The area has a third more than the national average of households that are deprived in at least two dimensions (22.6% compared with 14.2%) and this imbalance compared to the national average increases in three dimensions (more than twice the national average at 8.5% compared to 3.7%) and four dimensions of deprivation (almost five times as much at 0.9% compared to 0.2%).

The impact of poverty is reflected in living standards and house types for residents of Shirecliffe. Ownership of cars or vans, allowing for easier travel outside of the area to access services and support, is lower across all categories than the national average. The number of households with no cars or vans in Shirecliffe is 1.7 times the national average (40.4% compared to 23.5%) meaning that there is a higher than average proportion of residents that have no access to transport other than public transport. This transport is no longer subsidised to the extent it was during the post-pandemic period.

Data from the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero show that median use of electricity in the area has dropped almost 10% in the five years since 2020 despite little population change suggesting that residents are limiting their usage. Tenure type of households also evidence the lack of security with over 50% of residents living in socially rented properties, over three times the national average (51.6% compared to 17.1%).

The levels of income poverty are reflected in the economic activity and employment history of Shirecliffe residents. Residents are overrepresented in unemployment (4.5% compared to 3.5% national average) and being economically inactive (47.5% compared to 39.1% national average). Similarly, the amount of people who have never worked is over 1.5 times the national average (40.4% compared to 25.6%).



Those that are in employment are heavily overrepresented in semi-routine occupations and routine occupations, further evidencing the low-income levels in the area.



This information shows how residents in Shirecliffe experience deep and multi-layered poverty and deprivation that shape daily life. This is reflected in living standards, with car ownership being much lower, leaving residents reliant on limited public transport to access support. The drop in energy use by households suggests a restricting of essential energy consumption. Similarly, the high levels of socially rented accommodation indicates widespread housing insecurity. These factors are compounded by higher levels of unemployment, economic inactivity and an overrepresentation of residents in low-paid routine and semi-routine jobs. Together, these factors highlight a community facing established disadvantages, fewer opportunities and daily pressures.

Health

Utilising the English Indices of Deprivation, Shirecliffe is in the most deprived 2% of areas for health and disability in the UK. The Sheffield NHS Health and Social Care Foundation Trust highlights that there is an 8–10 year life expectancy gap between the Burngreave ward compared to the most affluent wards in the city.

The census additionally indicates that general health is poor in the area. Shirecliffe is underrepresented in both very good and good health (42.1% compared to 48.5% national average and 32.2% compared to 33.7% national average respectively) and overrepresented in fair, bad and very bad health (17.0% compared to 12.7% national average, 6.6% compared to 4.0% national average and 2.1% compared to 1.2% national average respectively).

There is also an overrepresentation of people classed as disabled under the Equality Act (24.4% compared to 17.3% national average). Similarly, there is an overrepresentation of higher burden of unpaid care with levels of those providing 20–49 hours of unpaid care a week being over a third higher than the national average (2.5% compared to 1.8%) and those providing 50 hours or more being over two thirds higher than the national average (4.4% compared to 2.6%).

This information highlights the deep and persistent health-related inequalities faced by residents of Shirecliffe. Combined, these factors indicate a community that has a high rate of health issues and strain on families and informal support networks, intensifying challenges residents face in their daily lives.

Available support

In the area there are few forms of support identifiable outside of the Shirecliffe Community Centre where the members of YMU met and began their work at the attached Meadows Nursery. There is nothing readily apparent on the local authority website's listings of community organisations, local forums or social media where small social actions can build a presence. This suggests that any help, if available, is not communicated widely or easy to find/access for residents.

Whilst the spaces at Meadows Nursery have grown and they work in a person-centred way with residents, the support they offer is limited to families of the children who attend. It is, however, a site that bodies from across the city such as health and wellbeing organisations utilise to reach residents. There is also a foodbank operated by another charity at the Community Centre, but usage requires a referral voucher. As such, it is not open to anyone and there is a limit on the amount of times an individual can access this support.

Overall, the limited and hard to identify support in Shirecliffe means that Shirecliffe Community Centre has become a central location for help and support. The work of Meadows Nursery and YMU play an important role within this, and by taking over Bishopholme Community Centre they continue to provide new points of support. Their presence provides vital opportunities for connection, practical and emotional support in an area where support is not readily apparent or visible.

Together, the evidence shows that Shirecliffe is an area that experiences deep disadvantages across poverty, health and access to services. In this context, the work that YMU does plays an important role by being not only open to supporting residents in ways they desire, but by opening new access points. Their presence fills gaps in provision and provides vital social and emotional support in a community where resources are lacking.

The origin and development of YMU

Meadows Nursery in Shirecliffe, Sheffield is a partnership between Sheffield Hallam University, Watercliffe Meadow Primary School, Sheffield City Council and Save The Children UK (STC). It aims to improve outcomes for children in the local area and is a research hub around early years education and care. Professor Sally Pearse at Sheffield Hallam University, the Director of the Early Years Community Research Centre, undertook co-designed research alongside STC around multiple insecurities facing families of young children (Tunstall et al., 2025; Demissie & Pearse, 2026). This involved working with mothers of children at the nursery to understand the issues families were facing. As part of this, a Theory of Change (ToC) was co-designed with the families using a capabilities approach (see Appendix, Figure A1). This was part of a national four-site study, with Meadows Nursery being the only site in Yorkshire and the Humber. The outcome of this has led to attention around child poverty from policy makers.

SY2I01 perceived providing a space where working in a community-led way was vital to being able to achieve what they did.

Involving this programme of work in the multiple insecurities research provided the space to build trust, open opportunities for conversation and move towards understanding what the community wants to achieve themselves.

“

We talk about it with children a lot, saying that we must give children freedom with guidance... that's what we were giving to the parents too, and that's why it became more than just a nursery. We were caring for more than just the kids. It was the whole family. They all quickly knew they could come in whenever they wanted and... there was always somebody that they could speak to (SY2I01).

”

This led to participants developing a Breakfast Club. Members of YMU saw this as the catalyst for them beginning their work. They describe it in terms of being given a voice, feeling empowered and understanding that they were able to make a difference.

“

So we came up with an idea to do a Breakfast Club for these adults, because kids get their Breakfast Club... Because adults, like me, went home... sat back, did nothing... Just to get people together initially. So we started doing that with a six-week trial, and that was really popular (SY1I01).

”

“

I think they can then start seeing themselves as belonging somewhere else... It was... right, let's deal with immediate needs and then... what else can happen for you and your family within your community?... They're the phases that we tend to go through: I can now think about me. I can now think about my immediate family, right? Now I can start thinking about my community and what I can do (SY2I01).

We got involved with [SY2I01], who worked at Meadows at the time, and we co-designed, they were a group of us co-designing something for what parents would want in our community. So we all threw some ideas out there, and one of them was a parent Breakfast Club. We trialled it for a couple of weeks and it absolutely kicked off (SY1I02).

”

Those participants who went on to form YMU took ownership of the Breakfast Club with support from Meadows Nursery and STC. Last year they took up residence in Bishopholme, a disused council Community Centre, with STC beginning the process of a Community Asset Transfer on behalf of YMU. From Bishopholme, they have expanded their work into a food club, where people pay a nominal fee to receive a food parcel and supplementary recipe cards to offer support around food poverty and nutrition, as well as providing a safe warm space for the community and a friendly face.

All participants reflected on how this research was a catalyst for them finding their voice and belief in their potential. They were motivated by being from the community and understanding the pressures faced. This fostered a drive to have a greater impact across their community, to provide positive role-models for their children and to gain personal pride in accomplishing something.

“

We just had that many ideas, and obviously... running a breakfast... there were parents from the community telling us what they want and what they need, that we just thought, you know what, we're listening to all this, we need to implement it, we need to get something done, and that's why YMU came about... We wanted to... help people and bring people out of poverty and depression and anxiety, things like that... We wanted to set up a group where we could just discuss it and get it done (SY1I02).

They were just so keen and committed that they wanted to give something back to the community... they were so keen to take on more... they wanted that responsibility. I think for some of them, they wanted their children to see that they were doing something... I think they wanted that achievement of being able to say, 'Oh, this is what I do and this is what I'm supporting' (SY2I01).

”

Three committee members joined YMU through the Breakfast Club. They emphasised how it was friends, family and neighbours who encouraged them, highlighting the welcoming environment and sense of community they felt. During the focus group, all participants emphasised the particular importance of the Meadows Nursery Breakfast Club in having helped them realise how many others in their local area were also struggling with loneliness and looking for support.

“

I'd been on maternity leave from work and... I got involved because of a friend persuading me to come along to a session...everyone was so welcoming, and it felt really comfortable... I feel part of the community (SY1I04).

They started the Breakfast Club, and then [SY1I01] [neighbour] dragged me along to Breakfast Club (SY1I03).

I think we were all a bit lonely before this. I think we were all the same as everyone else in the community. There was nothing to look forward to... Once we set up Breakfast Club, there were a lot of people that told the story about how they were lonely (SY1I01).

”

The importance of VCFS community-led support

Underpinning the co-productive work with the mothers involved in the project that would go on to form YMU is SY2I01, who had previously worked at Meadows nursery and then moved on to work for STC as a senior innovation and project officer.

The members of YMU saw her as playing a vital role in not just enabling them to come together, but to support their actions and choices going forward. They highlighted how her determination to understand and challenge them in a strengths-based manner grew their confidence and knowledge, and helped them achieve more than they had previously thought possible.

“

If it weren't for [SY2I01], we wouldn't have even known where to start with all this stuff... I think she gave me a kick up the backside... a bit of confidence... Because I was like, 'I can't, I can't, no, I can't'... 'Of course you can. You don't know until you're trying' (SY1I01).

It was [SY2I01]... saying 'You can do it. You can do it'. None of us believed we could ... [she] threw... most of us [in] at the deep end... She's good at reading people. She knew there were things that you couldn't tell me that were going to be happening until we got there. Because if you told me, I wouldn't be turning up... But [SY2I01] sees that we have got the courage and we have got the confidence, it's just us believing in ourselves (SY1I04).

”

However, SY2I01 sees her role as enabling the members to work towards achieving their goals. She discussed how through encouragement and motivation, connecting them into potential collaborators and giving them autonomy was key to unlocking their potential.

“

I had to do a lot of learning and working with people around really understanding what the roles were that they were going into, because I wanted to make sure that they had a good understanding of it as well... they really did need somebody sat alongside them, going through it bit by bit, making sure they understood what it meant, what it meant for that particular role they were going to take on....

They're doing the work, I don't do the work that they do... they're in the background or being that listening ear or offering a positive word compared to when we first met. The rest of it is them... [I'm] rallying behind them saying, yeah, we can, we can do it, I'm here to help you as well – let's make it happen... if we work hard enough, we can achieve (SY2I01).

”

Top 10%

Shirecliffe is among the most deprived 10% of areas in the UK.

Chapter 2:

Personal Values, Life and Community Context

This chapter discusses findings on the individual context of the members of the You, Me and Us Committee (YMU). The experiences and perspectives of members were gathered in a focus group and six subsequent individual interviews. Participants described their lives before coming into contact with one another, sharing important life events, what motivates them and what they see as the primary challenges facing the community. Broadly, four categories of life experiences emerge which have shaped their journeys: (i) experiencing sudden and traumatic events or important changes in life circumstances; (ii) living with long term mental health challenges and/or coping with isolation; (iii) lack of services and facilities; and (iv) relationships as a personal value.

Experiencing sudden and traumatic events or important changes in life circumstances (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

(i) Relocating and shifts in household composition (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

Although all participants described how they had moved around throughout their lives, all but one had stayed near or within the S5 boundary.

One participant described how her son had left home, but with his additional needs found it difficult living independently and moved back. Importantly, what they described was a sense of belonging within the Shirecliffe community which they saw as where they found a safer environment and were able to be closer to family, work and opportunities. Only one participant described moving to the area from a different part of Sheffield where her siblings lived and whilst she did miss them, she came to Shirecliffe to be closer to her daughters and grandchildren which she felt was important.

“

I've originally come down right outside... but when I had my first older boy, which was like 19, I moved up around these areas (SY1I03).

I wanted to be close to them [children and their families] so I followed them [to Shirecliffe] (SY1I06).

My son does [live with SY1I01], but he's ADHD and autistic, and at his own place, but then that's a problem, he just came back home (SY1I01).

”

(ii) Living with poverty (discussed by n=5/6 participants)

Five participants spoke about the poverty faced by their local community. This was discussed in terms of financial poverty, child poverty, food poverty and energy poverty. They described how they saw many people being unable to afford food, due to the rising cost of bills. They also witnessed people going without heating, but still being unable to pay their bills. This was seen to add significant pressures and stress on parents, as well as affecting children's health due to a lack of food and warm spaces. These circumstances were exacerbated during holiday periods, when the pressures placed on families to provide increased.

“

They're paying the money on the bills, so they're cutting down on the food, because... the bills need paying... the first thing they cut down on is the food (SY1I06).

Parents worry that they're not going to be able to feed kids in the holidays because the school won't be open (SY1I05).

”

Participants discussed how poverty also impacted families' ability to take part in any recreational activities which could offer relief/respite from stress. Local families had little resources and scope to do anything else other than cope. SY1I02 highlighted just how little there was locally that does not require money, particularly during winter, meaning that families become isolated.

They discussed how in some cases they had seen people rely on wider family for support, but noted that not everybody has this form of support or community.

“

A lot of these single parents or these young parents haven't got spare money to take their kids places. And when there's not places... where are they supposed to take them that doesn't cost anything? Play centres cost a fortune. Parks, they can't go to in winter because it's absolutely freezing, especially if they've got babies (SY1I02).

”

Two participants discussed in more detail the lack of opportunities for people in the area to take part in activities, particularly families. They highlighted how there were no parks that they felt safe to use for children: older children with no other opportunities took over spaces intended for younger children.

“

There's nothing for kids in this area growing up. Nothing at home, there's nowhere to take children, I've struggled with this one myself, the park is absolutely awful.... And the poverty is absolutely everywhere... There's nothing for older children to do, there's no youth groups, no anything. And as a parent to older children as well, that is a big thing... you can see why some kids... cause trouble. They're bored (SY1I05).

”

Living with long term mental health challenges and/or coping with isolation (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

(i) Mental health challenges (discussed by n=3/6 participants)

Three participants discussed mental health challenges. Two discussed personally experiencing these challenges and two discussed seeing them in their community, with one participant mentioning both.

The two participants who discussed personally living with mental health challenges described how this placed restrictions on what they were able to do and how their day-to-day challenges could exacerbate poor mental health.

SY1I01 described how her anxiety leads her to self isolate and not engage with others in the community. She spoke of how this self-isolation further affected her anxiety, stopping her from engaging in social activities with others – ‘Five years ago, I wouldn’t talk to nobody (SY1I01)’.

SY1I02 has suffered from depression and other mental health since a young age. She described how her family has a history of mental health issues and has impacted what she is able to achieve, how she can engage with others and her ability to cope with life’s challenges.

“

I think [my mum]’s been severely depressed since she was about 13, I’ve suffered with mental health since I were about 12, 13 (SY1I02).

”

The two participants who discussed negative mental health in the community described how it was caused, or exacerbated, by the struggles people faced around isolation, poverty and lack of access to support. They spoke of how they perceived a lack of opportunities and access to support to lead to residents suffering from low-self esteem and feelings of negative self worth. They also noted how they saw isolation as a result of a lack of opportunities within the community as exacerbating these issues further. SY1I06 particularly noted how she saw this low sense of self worth as creating a negative cycle across generations.

“

There’s so many people who think that they’re not [worthwhile] and that their children see that, they’re growing up with that and then they think I’m not bothered, but they’re not worthwhile: vicious circle, it’s gonna go down and down generation (SY1I06).

”

(ii) Isolation (discussed by n=3/6 participants)

Half of participants discussed isolation. One participant discussed their own personal experience of isolation and a further two described how this issue affected their community.

(SY1I06 discussed her experiences of isolation after moving to the Shirecliffe area from another area of Sheffield to be closer to her children and grandchildren.

(She loved being closer to them, but the move had distanced her from friends and siblings. She spoke of how when the grandchildren had started nursery she felt like she didn't have a clear purpose or community. She has a part-time job but felt she had a lot of time with not much to fill it with. She described how this sense of loneliness and isolation lead to a lack of confidence and reluctance to speak with others.

“

I felt a bit lost. And then grandkiddies come along, I've then got a purpose. And then they're growing up now... now, I've got lots of time (SY1I06).

”

Two participants believed the isolation they saw the community facing came from a lack of free spaces within the community. They noted how they have never seen spaces where people can go and spend time without spending money or feel an obligation to take part in specific activities.

They described how there were also no real spaces where community members could meet regularly or meet others for the first time, something they saw as leading people to isolate themselves, limiting residents from becoming engaged community members. SY1I02 also noted how there had been no active attempts historically to help different communities come together.

She discusses how the work YMU do is the first example she recalls of a space where people of different faiths can come together in Shirecliffe, commenting on how this lack of space for integration was evident when they first hosted a space for others.

“

In breakfast because they didn't know how to communicate, in case they speak English, or in case they said something wrong, like belief wise, or just anything. I think a lot of people had fears around that (SY1I02).

People keep to themselves (SY1I03).

”

Lack of services and facilities (discussed by n=3/6 participants)

(i) Lack of support (discussed by n=2/6 participants)

Two participants discussed how there was a lack of accessible support in the community for a variety of issues. These discussions focused on statutory support and the perceived lack of support and interest from both local and national government for communities like theirs. Both SY1I06 and SY1I04 perceived there to be a lack of access to medical support and development guidance for parents of young children. Indeed, where support was accessed it was felt to be inadequate and not understand the contextual issues that families in the area faced. SY1I04 further described how they also saw support from politicians as inadequate,

suggesting that their lack of local insight and consideration led to a lack of community trust in services.

“

If you wanted to speak to someone that's a doctor or a nurse it's not that easy... Doctor ain't got time to listen to you, like you sometimes need him to, they haven't got the time (SY1I06).

Is there a reason why they're [politicians etc] not listening?

Because they think the way that they're doing it is better...

And being in the community, has that trust fallen then?

Yeah, 100%. 110% (SY1I04).

”

(ii) Community infrastructure (discussed by n=2/6 participants)

Two participants discussed transport issues as directly related to, and influenced by, the poverty in the community. They discussed how lack of access to cars and the availability and cost of local public transport compounded residents' isolation and inability to access community support, opportunities and resources in the city.

Relationships as a personal value (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

All participants discussed a range of relationships they had which were important to them.

Almost all talked about their children, whilst three talked about their siblings. These relationships were discussed as key and central to their lives, helping them navigate challenges and share good times. One participant (SY1I05) spoke more generally about what she described as 'family', referencing her children, siblings and the other members of YMU, emphasising the close familial connection of the group.

“

Family's the most important thing to me (SY1I05).

”

(i) Children (discussed by n=5/6 participants)

All but one member (SY1I06) had young children currently living with them and one participant had had an older child move back in recently due to additional needs. Children were central to their lives: they were deeply valued and helped members lead fulfilling lives. Members' roles as mothers were a big part of their lives, giving them a sense of stability through helping them set routines and build structure. In addition, SY1I06 described how moving to be closer to her children enabled her to look after her grandchildren which she saw as both a positive thing for herself but also as an act of love for her daughters.

“

I don't really do anything apart from just, I mean we've got... our little set routine in the morning, we get up, we get ready to go to school (SY1I02).

It's just so tough for [their youngest daughter]... she's working, she's got two kiddies, she's on her own now and it's been tough for her... [I'm] always there for her when she needs it (SY1I06).

”

(ii) Siblings (discussed by n=3/6 participants)

Three participants discussed siblings. They all identified them as important people in their lives, to whom they were close, and expressed how much they valued these connections and the support system they provided. Even though one participant no longer lived near her siblings, the bond they shared was still strong.

“

[On who matters to them]... obviously my sister... I have always had them (SY1I04).

”

Personal values, goals and strengths (discussed by n=2/6 participants)

Whilst family, friendship and connections were the values that participants discussed in most depth, two participants also saw the wider values they held as a strength, giving themselves a sense of purpose and belonging that they would otherwise lack. One participant, SY1I01, identified how seeing the impact they were having in the community helped her value herself. In addition, SY1I06 spoke about her crafts and how she felt this helped her to see herself as having potential and able to contribute.

Chapter 3:

You, Me and Us Ways of Working and Nature of Community Support

This analysis comes from the six in-depth interviews and a focus group with members of You, Me and Us Committee (YMU), and the interview with SY2101 who supports the work of YMU. The chapter examines findings around the nature of support and strengths-based community building ways of working. The findings are categorised according to individual and community levels, reflecting the multiple levels at which strengths-based social action operates.

Nature of support and YMU's Ways of Working

Individual Level

Participants' discussions revealed the deeply human character of YMU. They described how they sought to provide help in a friendly, reassuring and non-hierarchical environment which recognised and respected people as individuals. In contrast to participants' experiences of services, they believed this created an atmosphere of openness which offered people agency to honestly communicate their wishes and challenges. Consequently, members felt reassured they would find understanding and support.

(i) Personal, friendly and reliable support (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

All participants described how YMU provided a welcoming and caring space where people, including themselves, were

personally known and supported. In a community they saw as marked by deprivation, and in contrast to the limited and unreliable engagement from health services and the local authority experienced by both individuals and the group, participants were committed to providing responsive and friendly help in any way they could. They believed this reliability and dedication offered those connecting with the group stability, and reassurance that there was someone on their side who was listening, who wanted to know their story, and who was going to try to help.

“

Everybody makes sure I'm well... they're just so welcoming, they include you in everything... we run this for everyone. A lot of people run organisations to earn something... We don't see a profit. Everything we get we put back in (SY1105).

We've always got the time... If somebody's got a problem, or somebody's... in need, or needs some help... they know they can contact one of us and we'll be there... They know that we will do as much as we can to help them in any way, shape or form we possibly can (SY1104).

”

“

I think it's just because they're seeing these faces every week and you get to know them people?... If you're going to the doctors', you're seeing a different doctor every day. It's just nice to talk to somebody that you know personally, like friends... We just listen to people and we all support each other... We're not doctors or we're not hospitals, we're just normal people, just the same as they are (SY1103).

”

This approach was seen to have a number of consequences such as: providing non-judgemental and understanding support; stronger connectivity which increased agency and choice; and being person-centred, responding to people as individuals.

(ii) Non-judgmental, understanding support, increasing engagement and trust (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

All participants described how having shared experiences removed worries around judgment or shame. This was understood to help both community members and participants feel safe and, for some, build on the trust created by the Breakfast Club. It also encouraged community engagement and connectedness, empowering members to share their experiences openly and to grow together as a group. This contrasted with participants' experiences with services or professionals, with one participant highlighting in particular how YMU sought to enable honesty without

fear of reprisal. This was also discussed by SY2101, who shared how having people from the community be reliably there for others increased trust.

“

We are members of the local community... we make them feel welcome... you don't have to put no airs or graces on when you come, everybody has a problem... [If you ask for help from the council] they think that you can't cope... we're local people from the local area... We're not social workers, we're not care homes, we're here to help... so nobody feels judged... we understand what it's like. Life's not perfect, nobody's life is perfect and we understand that... There's no ... this is how you should live and this is what you should do (SY1105).

I can be me. I don't have to put no mask on. I don't have to put no front on... We want this to be the biggest safe place that buries fear... We like to make people feel safe and comfortable and happy and if you're not... we would rather you voiced that and tell us why, so we can change that, because that is the last thing that we want (SY1104).

[At other places] it's never the same. I don't see the same person every week. So the parents probably don't see the same person every week. It's a different person on reception every week... they're the little bits that mean a lot to people (SY2101).

”

(iii) Stronger connectivity resulting in increased agency and choice (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

The majority of participants described how an atmosphere of mutual support and understanding enabled deeper and longer-lasting connections in which community members felt able to exercise agency and choice over the support they received. Participants stressed in particular how, in contrast to how more formal support tends to be structured, nobody was put under pressure to engage with the group or its activities: their wishes and freedom of choice were respected.

“

We're not asking people to commit... We're just saying... If you need us. If you need to talk. And if you don't... that's fine too. One day, you might want to go in and have a chat... There's no pressure... it's each individual's choice (SY1I01).

We can be there if you need us there or not, if you don't (SY1I06).

You come and go as you please. So, it's that freedom as well, that people feel like they're not, they're not pressured into coming if they don't want to, but they can if they do... We don't like to push people to chat, if they want to sit by themselves, that's fine (SY1I02).

”

(iv) Person-centred, responding to people as individuals (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

Finally, four participants described how the group saw and valued everyone, including themselves, as individuals. Rather than putting labels on people or placing restrictions or formalities around who qualified for help, as services did, YMU provided flexible, person-centred support. There was no eligibility criteria for support, with the group seeking to respond to the individual needs of members however they could.

“

It is a nice, welcoming, warming place, because we treat everybody like the human beings that they actually are (SY1I04).

You don't have to be referred to us, like you have to be referred to a food bank. Just turn up. It's not a referral, it's not a subscription, it's nothing... just quite laid back and chilled out (SY1I02).

From just a mum, at home, with the kids, going to work, going home, going to work, doing the same thing in a vicious cycle, constantly, to then come in here and to be recognised as more than just a mum and an actual individual person... because it were always 'Oh, so and so's mum'. I've got a name!... Here, I'm seen as the individual person that I actually am... I'm not just a mum... I'm me (SY1I04).

”

Community Level

Conversations with participants revealed the three chief factors in how YMU sought to build community capacity and encourage understanding, engagement and responsiveness: (i) The centrality of the groups physical location within the community; (ii) The conscious creation of connections across the community and between cultures; and (iii) Attempts to seek out and respond to the community's views on what activities it should offer.

(i) Facilitating access to support through being place-based and independent (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

The majority of participants commented on the value of YMU being based in the local community. As the only group of its kind in the area, being centrally located with its own premises was seen to facilitate community engagement, and afford YMU more operational control. As such, the group's physical proximity and ownership of its premises was seen to enable them to offer the community a unique opportunity to access freely available, responsive, local support.

“

I think we are quite unique... that we are the only place where people can come as a warm space that's not an actual service... we are the only one in this area... A lot of people have said that there were nothing around our community, and nothing for a few miles that were like us... there were definitely nowhere... giving out food parcels,

or soup and a sandwich. There were no warm spaces for people to go. It was literally just your GPs and that's it... Just services. There's not even charities around here. There's nothing (SY1I02).

I don't think I've ever heard of any other outside organisations... I've never heard of another committee actually doing anything... Meadows Nursery... you can drop in there and have a cup of tea and have a chat and they will help you as much as they can, but obviously they can only do so much as they're a nursery... and... there's only people that children actually go to that nursery that have got that support. ... I don't think there's any other support in the community for anybody (SY1I04).

It's something different to do. It's somewhere to get warm, have a warm drink, have a hot sandwich, and let the kids play... at Meadows, we could never get room to do anything. We were trying to book a room and couldn't... Whereas having this space gives you that (SY1I03).

”

(ii) Building connections within the community (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

The majority of participants spoke about how YMU built community cohesion and connections which otherwise would not exist. Events such as the Big Easter Weekend and the Eid celebration had brought people into contact with those from other backgrounds.

Participants saw these opportunities as a unique chance to bridge gaps within the community, challenge preconceptions and assumptions, and encourage understanding and acceptance.

“

We're all so, so different. You wouldn't think that'd work. But it does... everybody in this community, they're all different... Put them together, they're all learning so much from each other... we all look different, we're different age groups... different eras. So... sometimes... opinions on things are different, but... that's alright... We don't have to worry about it, we don't need to have a fight about it, it's just, we're different... we just accept it (SY1106).

We do Halloween parties and Christmas parties and summer fairs and we did an Eid celebration a few months back... which went absolutely brilliantly.. between 130 and 160 people [turned up]... It was packed. We had the whole inside and then the car park outside... It's nice to come together and celebrate different religions, because it's very much a diverse community (SY1104).

”

All participants and SY2101 discussed how YMU responded to community needs, something they believed encouraged the community to engage with them. They saw the group as run for and by the community, with community members deciding what it provided and sharing information about what it offered.

As a result, and in contrast to previous experiences of public services, participants did not see themselves as decision makers, but rather as active listeners, responding to the community. This was contrasted with a recent experience with the council, where the group described how they had resisted pressure from the council to adopt a specific formal structure which they felt misunderstood their values and would have prevented them following their own priorities and instincts. Whilst the group was intent on responding to community need, the local authority wanted them to apply to become a Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) which would have required them to more closely align with local authority priorities. Members linked their capacity to develop a deeper understanding of issues, increased engagement and a shared sense of togetherness to their values and ways of working. It was additionally believed to result in conscientious, flexible, and creative response to need where they felt the council had failed to offer appropriate support.

“

Listen to the communities. You shouldn't have a bunch of council workers who haven't got a clue, who haven't lived in the area, who haven't lived in poverty, sit in a room and say 'This is what we're going to do'... It is all about the community. It's about what they want, it's not about what we want...

So we're not doing it for us, we're doing it for everyone... Which is why we said we want to know what people want, so we can actually... embrace what they want. We can see how feasible it is, how doable it is (SY1I01).

I think that's important as well, having some of that, being able to be, whether it's relatable or just those interpersonal skills... I think that's what they're doing and they're doing it (SY2I01).

There's no point in setting something up if nobody's going to come... That's what we're here for... to give you what you want, not what we want. It's easy enough to sit here as a group... We could do that all day, every day but it's not about what we want, it's about what they want and that's when we're going to start getting interest (SY1I05).

SY2I01 perceived the ability of the members to be led by community need was developed through them being engaged in co-production themselves. She highlighted how she saw its effectiveness and felt included, trusting the effectiveness of this process.

They're quite keen to go back out to the rest of the members or community to get their opinion on it... I think [co-design] gives them the platform to be able to do that and [the thinking is] "Well, if we include everybody, you've got everybody's buy-in and they'll want to take part and they'll want to look after it"...

So they're... not protective to not let anybody else in, but this is theirs, it belongs to the community and they know that they make the decisions about it... it belongs to them... they can share ideas (SY2I01).

100%

of participants described YMU as providing a welcoming and caring space where people are personally known and supported.

Chapter 4:

Experienced Outcomes and Impacts

The analysis of immediate outcomes and longer-term impacts of the work that You, Me and Us Committee (YMU) have on one another and the community illustrates the complexities of how benefits can begin as an outcome and evolve into longer-term impacts. Therefore, this chapter focuses mainly on identified outcomes and where possible, discusses how these evolve into longer-term impacts. Furthermore, as the YMU collaboration emerged from the multiple insecurities work at Meadows Nursery and the Breakfast Club, the activities, outcomes and impacts are a continuum attributable to the journey participants have been on. It is important to recognise that the community-led support from Sheffield Hallam University and Save the Children helped to build the momentum of the group and facilitated its evolution.

Individual Level

Participation first in Meadows Nursery Breakfast Club and then the decision to form YMU has impacted deeply on the six women involved. The individual level outcomes and impacts are discussed here, with wider community level benefits being discussed in the following section. Individual level benefits are organised under the following themes: i) building confidence, self-esteem and supporting mental health, ii) being there and breaking down isolation and iii) building resilience, active citizenship and personal agency.

(i) Building confidence, self-esteem and supporting mental health (discussed by n=5/6 participants and SY2I01)

A majority of group members discussed how involvement with YMU had led to them growing in confidence and self-esteem, as well as enjoying a positive impact on their mental health. They also discussed how SY2I01 and the team at Meadows Nursery had built their confidence by believing in them, offering them reliable, consistent support and opportunities to learn new skills. This had pushed the group to develop beyond what they thought possible. In particular, SY2I01's ability to understand them and challenge them appropriately had increased their personal confidence. Similarly, SY2I01 discussed how she saw the peer support, drive and confidence members gained from one another as key to these outcomes.

“

I think that's important as well, having some of that, being able to be, whether it's relatable or just those interpersonal skills... I think that's what they're doing and they're doing it (SY2I01).

”

Four of the women articulated how this had enabled them to grow their belief that they could make change happen and contribute to supporting their community.

“

So then obviously, when I started coming to Meadows Nursery and then got into this, it was a life changer for me. It was, like, I actually got a reason... [SY2I01] she gave me a kick up the backside, so she gave me a bit of confidence, like... Because I was like, 'I can't, I can't, no, I can't'... Yeah, yeah. Of course, you can. You don't know until you're trying' ... so then obviously... I think it's just that confidence thing. I have been on such a journey... I have completed the Start Well programme, Wellbeing sessions and Parents are Experts. This has been really helpful and has supported me to do things I wouldn't normally do (SY1I01).

We thought no one would listen to us, and the one person who did were [SY2I01] who pushed us to achieve... we all feel so proud now... it started from [SY2I01] saying 'Come on into nursery... have a cup of tea' ...We'll make it work! I don't think any of us thought we'd be where we are today. I think that belief has made all of us grow in different ways and all coming together, we can make it work, we can make a difference and we're never alone (SY1I06).

I wouldn't be able to sit in here like a couple of years ago and just talk to anyone and everyone...

So it's definitely brought a lot of confidence out for me... a lot of self-esteem and a lot of self-belief as well... I didn't believe in myself for a very long time, yeah, I just thought,... I'm worthless. I weren't really great in secondary school, like I was quite a naughty kid. I think that's just because of what I'd been through. Nobody had actually known what I'd gone through.... I kept it a secret until I was 17... to obviously start up Breakfast Club and You, Me and Us... I feel like I'm getting back to my own self now, where I'm a bit more confident and I know I'm doing good because I'm helping people... that's what makes us feel good (SY1I02).

If somebody told me I'd be doing this, I'd have laughed them out the door... I'm a bit more confident; I will speak to other people... It's brought me closer to my children. My youngest, he does all the trips with me, camping and everything... Being pushed out of your comfort zone has been a positive thing for me: it has made me communicate more and definitely made me more confident in social situations (SY1I05).

”

(ii) *Being there and reducing isolation*
(discussed by n=6/6 participants)

Building relationships and trust through supporting each other was a common theme discussed by all the group members. This atmosphere of mutual support had helped them become stronger and more focused.

Again, they all discussed how SY2I01 had been instrumental in 'being there' and making them feel they weren't alone. In evolving in this way with the support of SY2I01, YMU created a safe space where people felt more comfortable, creating new opportunities and growing a vital support network.

This was illustrated by one group member who spoke of how joining YMU had, by necessity, been a slow process:

“

Before You, Me and Us I used to just go to school, come home and sit in the house... I wouldn't say I'm anti-social, but I'm not a people person... I wouldn't have as many friends... I'd probably still be at home on my own... I used to take my son to school, and I used to wait outside Breakfast Club, by the gates... and I wouldn't [go in] until [her sister] were there... then it got to the point where I'd just walk in and everyone's like, right, make a drink... I don't like socialising with people, but it were nice... We'd talk about things, about books, things like that, and about YMU, and I'd start staying that little bit longer every week, and then we'd start 'Oh, shall we do this? Do you want to come to this?'... then I'd start to go to things... it's because we all just help each other, isn't it? If you haven't got strength to do something, somebody else has got that strength to do it. If I don't know how to do something, they know how to do something, someone will. So we all just help each other (SY1I05).

”

Four members discussed how YMU had also had a significant impact on their children. They described how the group had developed their children's social skills and appetite for discovery. This had helped members appreciate the value of their children attending nursery and got both members and children better ready for formal education.

“

He wants to see everybody... A better environment in the holidays... doing something exciting, like a little camp... nobody bats an eyelid if he stands staring at you for ten minutes and starts while lying. Because that's just who he is, whereas before I've avoided taking him into certain spaces for fear of in a lot of places to feel that judgement that someone would give me... it's not nice... it's like we're another little family (SY1I05).

He is learning lots of new skills earlier and is a lot more curious, not like my other children... Although he is only a year old I think he will be and I will be much more prepared for nursery and school (SY1I05).

They just learn off each other don't they, children, and then you can tell that [name] a massive bubbly, he's talking and everything else, being around, especially nursery and then obviously being around all these people and he's grew up with them so he's got a good bond with them all (SY1I03).

”

These experiences were shared across the group, with other members discussing how being part of YMU had broken down their isolation and built a significant co-support system. This support network positively affected their mental health, made them feel valued and reinforced their connection with each other.

“

It gives me a boost to come here... I don't want to be alone...I wasn't well the other night. We've got a WhatsApp group chat...'is everything alright?' 'is there anything we can do?'... Before, if I weren't well, I'd sit in bed and feel sorry for myself. I'd feel crap and I didn't have anybody to cheer me up, to talk to, to help me out, to have the kids, nobody... We become like a family, one we actually wanted (SY1I01).

I think they just make me feel safe... it helped me massively... put a routine in place for me. Even though it was only once a week on a Thursday, I knew that I always had something to do on that set day... I knew on that one day I'd at least get some adult socialisation. ..It made a massive difference to my mental health... sometimes you just need that support from people that aren't in your family circle... you need that outside support as well... This is the family that we've created now. We're all like one big family (SY1I04).

I think it's just because I feel safe in this space, and obviously we've built a group up, we've built this up to where

we all trust each other, and we're all very close now, it's given me that social really, to have that confidence that my kids aren't just being brought up by me... I never had a close-knit friend group like that before... they all notice if one of us is missing (SY1I02).

”

(iii) Building resilience, active citizenship and personal agency (discussed by n=3/6 participants and SY2I01)

The effects of growing in confidence and support network has been transformational for some of the group members. Half of the members and SY2I01 discussed this explicitly. They see it as changing their outlook on the world, growing understanding and empathy with others and being able to step-in and connect local people to support. For two older members, this newfound sense of agency was seen to 'giv[e] them a purpose' or a new 'drive' in life. Their experiences have resulted in both of these members getting involved in their community and achieving things through supporting others they'd never done before.

“

It's gotten me out of the house. To be honest, it's kept me going. It's given me something to do. It's given me purpose. You know what I mean?... I used to go home and just sit... I really wanted to walk away.

And then, like, they're like four years later, it makes you glad that I didn't walk away... I just went, and I just sucked it up, and... Yeah, putting that effort... Five years ago, I wouldn't talk to nobody. Whereas now, I'm quite willing to, like, go to supermarkets and say, are you willing to donate some food? Are you willing to donate this? Yeah, we're talking to people. Do you know, this is what we're doing? Would you be interested in participating or whatever? (SY1I01).

I sometimes used to think 'I'm the only one what's struggling'. Now I know, there's lots of more serious struggles for people, what I didn't actually realise. And I used to think that, 'Oh, I know this, I'm right'. But listening to other people, it's changed my mind on a lot of things... a lot of things were different to what I realised... In some of the projects, what we have done, we didn't think we could do it, but we did. And we're not as scared now of professionals as before... We were like... 'We can't do this'. [But] we know we can, with strength in numbers ... I don't think we can massively change anything... but we can get in contact with the people, what they want to get involved, we can do that for people, which sometimes they won't ask, we will, because we're confident now (SY1I06).

”

Two of the younger group members described similar transformations in respect of their confidence and mental health, skills and employability.

Both had moved from being helped to helping others. One participant now shared their personal experiences with others, whilst the other had taken advantage of the opportunity to train as a mentor and coach, in turn using these skills to train and support others in her community. This same participant discussed how she'd always struggled at school.

“

I'll have a lot of things to put down on my CV. I'll do a lot of training as well with You, Me and Us. I've done the knowledge to nurture training... Save the Children paid for me to go on the course and we basically learnt different techniques... So I'm a qualified trainer for that now. I can train other people... I think we're on about doing it after Christmas, setting it up in Bishopholme for me to get a group of people in and train them to do knowledge to nurture as well... all experience I'm gaining from this, I'll definitely be able to go into a career that suits me... I feel like I have so much more confidence than I had before. I feel like I have a voice for myself but also for my family (SY1I02, Participant Journey Narrative).

One thing I am most proud of is that I now have a peer support group and I can offer my support too. This has really helped with my mental health (SY1I05, Participant Journey Narrative).

”

SY2I01 similarly discussed how being supported by each other has helped the group grow in their confidence and abilities. She described how this support allowed them to overcome previous negative experiences as well as instill belief in their own potential.

“

A lot of these parents, they're really, really bright and they're so clever and it's not that they don't want to work, they don't want to do training, that's not the issue at all. It's a little bit of fear of the unknown, going into a building for the first time and not knowing anybody or the building can be quite isolating and for some parents it brings back traumatic experiences that they've had. So that's why, wherever possible, we always try and get the training either at [the nursery] or we'll go as a group... so that again, they've got that peer-to-peer support... often a lot of people get involved in other training or are happy to share their life celebrations with us because they see it as a bit of a family and that's what generally comes through as well on top of the other stuff (SY2I01).

”

Community Level

As well as reflecting on how YMU and the Breakfast Club had impacted on their own lives members also discussed its wider community benefits and impacts.

These benefits cluster around the following: i) Growing community connections and cross-cultural understanding, ii) Reducing isolation and supporting mental health and iii) Growing local capacity and filling the gaps left behind by the withdrawal of mainstream welfare services.

(i) Growing community connections and bringing together cultures in a shared space (discussed by n=4/6 participants)

This was discussed by four members around how the Breakfast Club and now the YMU space in Bishopholme created a safe, shared and informal community space which was easily accessible for local people to come together, share food, culture/faith, experiences or concerns and receive support. Before Meadows Nursery there was nowhere where parents could come together to support each other in this way: the value of this space had therefore been increased further by the asset transfer of Bishopholme Community Centre to the group.

“

We're doing [Breakfast Club] three weeks now and we've met a few new people but obviously people have come.. and they've told their family, friends and it's really growing... it helps massively with food... [but they also] find friendship, so that's meaningful to them as well... We've been trying to get a space, and that's been a bit hard, getting a space to do what we want to do. But now we've got it... that seems to have got us noticed (SY1I06).

”

“

It's not the best area it can be, quite a lot of the time. It can be quite intimidating for a lot of people. Yeah, even people our age (SY1I01).

So they were just at home doing nothing, there was nothing for them to do, they had no money to go out and do any hobbies, no like spare money or anything like that, and yet they said it got really lonely, and I think a lot of them just enjoyed that, dropping their kids off at school, knowing that they didn't have any responsibilities for the rest of the day, they could just come, let loose with whatever they're thinking, in a judge-free zone, eat some yummy food, drink a nice warm cup of tea... just a nice warm social space (SY1I02).

”

They all discussed how a chief benefit of the Breakfast Club and YMU for the wider community was how it created and fostered a space for community connectedness. Festival events like Eid celebrations, Christmas parties and summer camping trips all fostered connections and bridged gaps and tensions that had previously existed between different communities and recent migration to the area.

“

In breakfast because they didn't know how to communicate, in case they speak English, or in case they said something wrong, like belief-wise, or just anything. I think a lot of people had fears around that... they've overcome those fears, and literally everybody talks to everybody there, and a lot of people have said it's made them more confident to be on the outside, just publicly, walking and just actually speaking to someone that's not the same as them (SY1I02).

In Breakfast Club met a lot of Asian ladies and I thought I knew... about their religion... Oh my gosh, they're lovely people. I wouldn't have, a lot of years ago, mingled with Asian people or anyone foreign... I think that was my upbringing but I love it now and I've learned so much about their way of life, why they do the things they do... Eid party... the celebration was amazing, and they are so, so family-oriented, and that's me! And I didn't think that before. I'm learning so much and they want to learn as much English as they can: a lot of people feel like 'They don't wanna learn the language' [but] they do! Go mingle with them: they do! It's amazing (SY1I06).

”

(ii) Reduced social isolation, addressing food support needs and mental health (discussed by n=6/6 participants and SY2I01)

Earlier chapters set out how the challenges facing local communities around poverty, alongside feelings of being left behind by services, were a driver for the group to form. The immediate benefits of providing a supportive community space for local families in turn brought important benefits for reducing experiences of isolation, mental and physical health.

Activities such as the Breakfast Club, food bank/food bag initiative, social trips and celebrations were felt by all members to provide residents with resources and opportunities they would not otherwise have had, helping to reduce feelings of worry around the opportunities they could give their children. They all discussed how residents' responses had been very positive, with participation at capacity and people vocalising their support for the initiatives. SY2101 also emphasised how this support had begun to change parents' relationships with their children which positively impacted mental health.

“

Because they know that every Thursday morning, when it's Breakfast Club, even if they've not spoke to a single person all week... they know they can come to anyone at Breakfast Club...

We've now got a WhatsApp group, so they can contact us, they can contact anyone from Breakfast Club, any of us, and just check in, basically. So they know that they've always got someone there for them (SY1102).

Mental health-wise, I think that's definitely had the most positive effect from us. Like I said, bringing people out of depression and anxiety, even if it's just a little bit, just giving people something to look forward to, knowing that they've actually got some friend with them as well.

All the kids get on, there's hardly any arguments between them... it's so nice... they are playing with children their age. The kids love it, the kids always say to me "Are we going to Bishopholme tomorrow?". It's nice the fact that they want to be there... they love being around everybody (SY1104).

We've started the food bags and that's made a massive impact on people... it's not just for the children, it's for anybody... massive, massive help, they get so much for just £5...You can't go anywhere else and get a sandwich and a drink for a pound. It keeps people warm, gives people a bit of socialising, it gives people that bit of space... A lot of kids wouldn't have been able to go to the seaside, they wouldn't have been able to go to the theme park, things like that... a lot of people wouldn't have had the support to [go swimming] with their children (SY1105).

”

“

We give them advice and obviously at Food Pantry, I think a lot of them were like..., oh, this is really good, you can't get this from shopping. They were buzzing over it... Like last week, they were like, oh, this is really good, you can't get this from shopping. They were buzzing over it. They sent us pictures of it cooked, and then they did us a feedback form and they all seemed to enjoy it (SY1I03).

It's a drop-in, so if you don't come one week, that's fine, but I know it's going to be on the week after... It's a bit of a drop-in for [some members] now... every time [they] need a bit of an emotional fix... [a member] rocked up last week because she was like, 'Oh, I needed to come and just check in and just see people'... for her own mental health and that gave her a real boost again... And like I said, that's different for everybody that walks through the door... Sometimes it's just, 'Oh, I'm going to get a meal today'... because... food poverty is still a massive thing... Some, it's the connection of meeting other parents, getting that peer-to-peer support (SY2I01).

”

(iii) Growing local capacity and filling the gaps left behind by the withdrawal of mainstream welfare services (discussed by n=6/6 participants)

The transformational aspects of YMU were significant and discussed by all members.

YMU was both addressing unmet needs and filling in gaps left behind by mainstream services. This impact was seen as particularly pertinent around food poverty and the group was encouraged by the responses they were getting from people who received this support. This impact was also a result of the group having their own location at Bishopholme. This space, embedded within the community and manned by the members who are from the community, allowed them to make these connections and grow capacity.

“

It's going to make people feel a lot better, like it's going to be massive in their life. Because I think a lot of people are worried about what they can do with the kids, how they can feed them. [The food bag] comes with a step-by-step menu. Every ingredient you need. Even down to art or chocolate and vegetables or things like that. You never been taught how you're going to know? Parents feel better because of you and the kids. Yeah. Proper food... They're not just giving you something out of the tin (SY1I01).

”

“

Last week a young girl came in for a foodbag and said 'I'd not be able to get this from Tesco'... saving money hopefully means they can do something as a family... The feedback that we've been getting from the food bank... there were people that came in last week and said 'It's a massive, massive help'... I took [neighbour] a food parcel and he was like 'You're amazing, absolutely amazing'... 'it were absolutely amazing' and it does, it means a big difference for people (SY1105).

We just listen to what people say and what they think... We just listen to what people like, what they're like. There's one lady at Breakfast Club that said that she can't cook because she looked like she can't use a knife. She looked like she had to chop things up. So that's how we come up with food, both things, I think, with recipes, step by step, step by step with everything (SY1103).

Some of the new parents have also said that it's helped their mental health a lot because they feel comfortable coming in and venting to us. Because even if they don't want that response, they'll just sit and they'll just listen. Sometimes it's just that listening ear that somebody wants off a stranger because they want to say stuff that they don't really want to say to people that they know. So we will sit there and we will listen to them (SY1104).

”

5/6

participants
reported increased
confidence,
self-esteem and
positive impacts on
their mental health.

Chapter 5:

Looking Towards The Future

A plan and vision for themselves, the group itself and the community (discussed by n=6/6 participants and SY2I01)

All participants shared their thoughts about the future. Participants are looking forward to achieving both short-term and long-term goals related to structural and social transformation. In the short term, participants were more concerned with expanding service provision, particularly the food bank initiative and community-related activities. Long-term plans included refurbishing a community bus and completing the community asset transfer for Bishopholme. SY2I01 also briefly touched on the future, hoping that the group's members would be proud of what they had achieved so far. She saw this as being an important step towards being able to demonstrate to others how they can make a difference in their communities.

“

I want them to believe in themselves as well... it won't be me they're talking about. They'll be talking about themselves. That's the next thing that they really need to do. Because they should be so proud of what they've achieved... It would give them a platform to have a voice, but also make some decisions about what's going to happen in their community (SY2I01).

”

(i) Immediate short-term plans (discussed by n=5/6 participants)

Almost all participants outlined a range of short-term plans that cut across multiple areas of activity. These can be broadly grouped into community support and welfare provision, social and recreational activities, and organisational infrastructural development.

In terms of community support and welfare provision, participants described plans to expand the food bank through soup provision, support pensioners, organise workshops for young people on basic life skills and support residents during the winter with warm clothing. Social and recreational activities include hosting events such as a Halloween party, organising exercise activities and running bingo sessions. Meanwhile, in terms of infrastructural development, the participants were interested in putting the group's name on their building and developing their own garden.

“

Putting our name across when we're there... we're in the process of doing.... Just letting everybody know we're here... we're going to have an Open Day... get someone in here that can give advice for their benefits... there's going to be a Halloween party... we want to have an outdoor garden with children on a Wednesday...

Some sort of exercise plan... different things in the evening, bingo and stuff... making fresh soup (SY1I05).

But we're also planning to do an exercise class. We're looking into some fun things like to get some exercise classes on a Wednesday. Okay. As a drop-in thing again, just people just... Yeah, I don't know. You're not committed to come. No. You either come or you don't. It's entitled to each individual (SY1I01).

We also want to do a lot of workshops for young adults and teens to learn just basic life skills. Like how to change a plug and how to change a washing machine, you know? Just your basic life skills that you don't actually think about as well. Teaching them how to cook so they can actually cook for themselves (SY1I04).

”

ii) Long-term future plans (discussed by n=3/6 participants)

Three participants shared the group's long-term plans, which included taking ownership of the community bus and transferring ownership of the group's Community Centre building from the council to the group.

According to one participant, it was hoped this would give the group greater independence, increase its visibility, and open new funding opportunities.

Two participants discussed refurbishing a community bus they had taken ownership of to better meet local needs and extend the group's reach. They saw this as allowing them to carry out outreach activities such as prison visits and events.

“

To be honest, I mean, we have got a community bus, but we need to refurbish. So we've got a bus. We just need to refurbish that and we can get that out and about. And obviously, we've finished it. I think one of the plans is maybe to do like a drop-in centre for, like, the prison services. Like, so there's, like, benefits there. Somewhere that some people can just drop in and get information (SY1I01).

If we go to any events like in areas and stuff like that, the bus can be there and it can be packed with information and activities as well we can take information to different areas (SY1I06).

”

Another key long-term goal was completing the community asset transfer of the community building with support from STC. It was hoped that this would help address the challenge of limited capacity to build stronger connections and trust with community members to address their problems.

“

The big thing is, just to make it work, we're probably getting an asset transfer. We want an asset transfer, so we want this building to go to the group. So, we're not tied to everyone on council... Yeah, we want to be able to pretty much own the building. So, we could get funding in that way as well, because we can make the room out when we're not in it. And then obviously people can just drop in and say, well, I've got this problem, this problem, this problem, what do I do about it? I'm going to go and get some names, get some numbers, even get them to file a report for them, do you know what I mean? Yeah, it'd be so much simpler when you help people immediately rather than waiting. It's just in one place (SY1I01).

To own this building and get it how we want and to just help other people, we're looking at an asset transfer. We want the kitchen extended a tiny little bit... And then, obviously, we want the garden fenced off to make it safer for children when they're playing out (SY1I03).

”

However, half of the interview participants were cautious about setting specific outcomes and objectives for the future based on what the group thinks. Rather, they stressed that it should be based on the community needs, perceiving that this will foster a sense of community ownership and pride among individuals and the community at large.

“

The things that we've wanted to do, we've done it, but now we just need to figure out what people want to do and then go from there. But I'm hoping we can do what people want (SY1I03). We should be doing more, we're not sure what minute, but we can do more... We don't want it to just be our ideas... We want everyone to have their ideas and then if it happens, they'll know 'Oh, I mentioned... Oh yeah, that's part of it'. We want... lots of members, lots of people going through the door (SY1I06).

We can't really focus on next year, because we don't know what people are wanting. Between now and next year. Between now and next year, I guess in some, we've had to open up and get ourselves where we are, just for what we're doing, this is what we're here for. Yeah. And found out what people actually want. And then we can look into where we're going to be in a year's time. You know, what are we going to do in a year's time, because our people are going to be bored of this, and you want something different? (SY1I01).

”

Wider challenges perceived (discussed by n=5/6 participants)

Most participants reflected on challenges they saw YMU facing. These included a lack of funding opportunities, the knock-on impact of the delays of obtaining the community asset transfer, accurately capturing community need and being heard and understood by higher level stakeholders in the local and regional authority.

(i) Lack of funding (discussed by n=2/6 participants)

Participants shared how the lack of funding has restricted their impact and reach and also placed a limitation on several initiatives the group would love to explore. One discussed the challenges of completing funding applications and the capacity and commitment required to meet funding deadlines.

“

It's finances. Yeah. Again, we're relying on, like, random things. We're relying on people to donate money for us to set up and do what we can do. Without funding there's not very much we can do... [if you get the funding, the doors are open. I mean, if you get the funding...] then we can go ahead and do what people are wanting, you know? It's just, obviously, the funding thing is what's holding us back, you know? Because we're waiting for funding coming through (SY1I01).

The biggest issue is definitely money, because we've got that many ideas between us, that we want to, obviously, start them, and we can't start them without the funding... We are applying for every bit of funding we could possibly get. Obviously, the funding applications are just very lengthy. We've all got kids, and some of them don't go full days... so, it's quite difficult to complete a full application. We're all having to pass round each other, and then we're going to have to proofread it, and it's just really difficult to try and get it in on time (SY1I02).

”

(ii) Transfer of the community building (discussed by n=2/6 participants and SY2I01)

SY2I01 described the lack of engagement and investment from the local authority around the building, despite the investment members have put into it and their growing connections with local residents.

“

The council currently owns the building, so currently... Save the Children are paying for the space at the minute. So they send their letters out saying 'This is what you owe'... but there is no contact... on there. It's literally the brown envelope coming through your letterbox... but nobody seems to even care about that because they're not making direct contact. It's just another letter, but no contact details on there... and you go through the motions [and] what you get is 'Oh well, that's not under our area'... We've had the building since July, beginning of August, there's been no contact from the council whatsoever. Not one (SY2I01).

”

Another key barrier the group faces is a lack of ownership of community building, which continues to hinder their flexibility, independence and its ability to make concrete plans for the future. Two participants discussed how the community building will provide a foundation for the group and, in turn, reduce the financial strain they are facing.

“

Just give us a building. Just give us some space that we can actually work from without having to think about it. It's like a big financial issue. So we rely on funding, but then a lot of that funding then goes on rent. Just give the building the time that we can work from. We don't have care of it. Funding then goes over (SY1I01).

We've been trying to get a space, and that's been a bit hard, getting a space to do what we want to do. But now we've got it, we're not letting go and we're going to show the professionals... that seems to have got us noticed (SY1I06).

”

(iii) Being heard and understood by higher level stakeholders (discussed by n=2/6 participants and SY2I01)

Two participants and SY2I01 spoke about how they wanted the group's voice to be heard by policymakers and other stakeholders who can help influence community and individual lives, particularly when addressing issues such as child poverty. However, one participant also acknowledged how this requires consistency and is not a change that can be achieved overnight. Despite the challenge of being heard and getting residents to engage with the council, this participant was optimistic and positive about future engagement with the local council and the council's willingness to listen to the group. SY2I01 also highlighted how this sometimes felt like a repetitive challenge.

“

I think eventually we will get to a place where we need to be and get the people that we need to get to listen. We're going to try our hardest against Parliament and all sorts [in respect of the child poverty strategy] because something needs to change... [We want to] expand, get to where we want to be, be listened, heard and valued by the people that we need to be listening. Because at the minute it's going to absolute tatters (SY1I04).

I just hope that we're able to do what we've set out to do. Just, I hope that we're able to get rid of some of that poverty and get some of that stigma about, especially young mums not doing this and that with the kids. Young mums are lazy and single parents never take the kids anywhere. I mean, a lot of people have judged that, but they don't know individual circumstances (SY1I02).

There's only so much telling you can do, to local authority, before you're stepping on toes (SY2I01).

”

Summary of Insights

Policy/Practice Learning

This research with You, Me and Us Committee (YMU), capturing their way of working, evidencing how they support and grow community capacity, agency and voice, reveals the potential of communities to make changes for themselves. It is their unique combination of peer-led support, lived experience and an environment that prioritises enabling people that is leading to YMU's successful outcomes both at the individual and community level. It was found that YMU's specific ways of working enabled residents to open up, providing a "listening ear" and a non-judgemental space which allows them to uncover and address deeper underlying challenges associated with poverty and social isolation. This culture of mutual respect and shared experience was important not only for the residents they serve, but also for the group's members who began their journey as participants in a co-production project. Their approach builds confidence and the resources for resilience by meeting individuals, and one another, where they are in life and enabling them to take control of their situation.

This way of working was identified as leading to outcomes and impacts at two levels:

- The individual level
- The community level

At the individual level it was found that YMU enabled strong outcomes by fostering independence and resilience.

These members of YMU moved from being socially isolated and withdrawn into being active and engaged citizens making a difference for others in their community with a sense of purpose. By providing a consistent presence and being there for others they proactively support one another and others. This person-centred way of working leads to members and residents feeling genuinely heard and valued, resulting in increased self-esteem and more confident and socially connected residents.

At the community level it was found that YMU acts as a catalyst for community resilience, resource building and strengthening capacity within their area. This fosters connections and reciprocity between community members who previously felt abandoned by the system. They also enable access to essential support, advocating for one another.

"We just listen to people and we all support each other... We're not doctors or we're not hospitals, we're just normal people, just the same as they are."

YMU Participant

Bibliography

Burchell, J., Cook, J., Thiery, H., Hulme, C., Twiddy, M., & Adams, K. (2026). A strengths-based model for evidencing the impact of second wave prevention programs in social care. *Journal of Social Work*.

Cook, J., Burchell, J., Twiddy, M., Hulme, C., Wilberforce, M., Martin, A., Thierry, H., Ledger-Jessop, B. & Webb, E. (2024). Bridging the Gaps In Evidencing Prevention: Key Findings from a Multi-site Study of Local Area Coordination. [Report]. Accessible from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U07lvT-uhknJEtyY9f9LrqFqJ_Ejtbo8/view?usp=drive_link.

Demissie, F., & Pearse, S. (2026). Stories of Becoming: Addressing inequalities through co-designed early childhood services [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. (2025, September 25). Energy consumption in the UK (ECUK) 2025. GOV.UK.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025, November 17). English indices of deprivation 2025. Statistical release. GOV.UK.

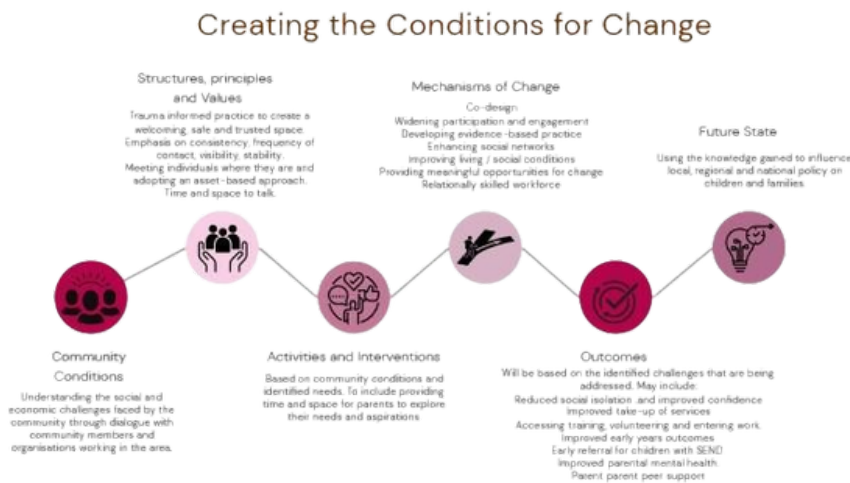
Office for National Statistics. (2022). 2021 Census. UK Data Service.

Tunstall, R., Bucelli, I., Grugulis, I., Henderson, S., Lane, L., Lomax, H., Mangan, A., McKnight, A., Payne, J., Pearse, S., Sorvala, L., & Webb, J. (2025, June 6). Insecure lives: The growth and impact of multiple insecurities. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), London School of Economics and Political Science. Accessible from: <https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/insecure-lives-the-growth-and-impact-of-multiple-insecurities/>

Appendix

Figure A1

Theory of Change co-designed by Fufy Demissie, Sally Pearse and families facing multiple insecurities, using a capabilities approach (Demissie & Pearse, 2026).



We thank you for your ongoing support.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank participants for their time and insight, and Sheffield Hallam University for facilitating access to the YMU Committee.

Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)

YPIP is a regional partnership working on new and better ways of sharing knowledge and making decisions to improve local lives and places in Yorkshire.

Get in touch



ypip@leeds.ac.uk



ypip.org.uk



[LinkedIn](#)



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**