

Association of Camerados

Ground Floor Office Barn Innovation Hub,
Earth Trust,
Little Wittenham,
Abingdon, OX14 4QZ



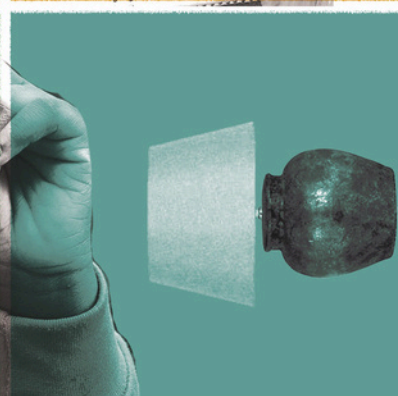
camerados.org



CAMERADOS

10 YEAR LEARNING REPORT

Everything the Camerados Movement has learnt
since 2015 about mutuality, grass roots
community spaces and growing a movement.
Includes all our mistakes!



A huge thank you to the folk of the Camerados movement who, as well as being pretty darn fundamental to this social movement even existing, are the people who;

Told their stories
Helped to gather information
Filled out postcards
Took part in interviews and surveys
Created Ripple Effect Maps
Co-produced the learning strategy

Their active participation has meant that this report is able to reflect the fantastic connections, impact and (in some cases) life-saving changes that have happened to those who use Public Living Rooms, the principles and look out for each other in their everyday lives.

From the Association of Camerados,
the small team of folk in a shed that supports the Camerados movement.





INDEX

Otherwise known as the handy list of page contents

Page 4 Highlights - 2 minute read.

Page 8 Introduction.

Page 9 The Principles.

Page 10 Approach to learning, our partners and methodology.

Page 14 What if someone like Samaritans ran Starbucks?

Page 19 The two big bets - Teepees V Boxes.

Page 24 When in person connection became illegal!

Page 30 Mission drive - a Public Living Room in every neighbourhood.

Page 37 What did our learning tell us about how to grow a social movement?

Page 42 - Conclusions - Key learning themes.




Highlights - 2 minute read

(or what you normally call the executive summary)



"It's a transformation. You can see people transform in front of your eyes. You can see people smile when they've come there downtrodden."

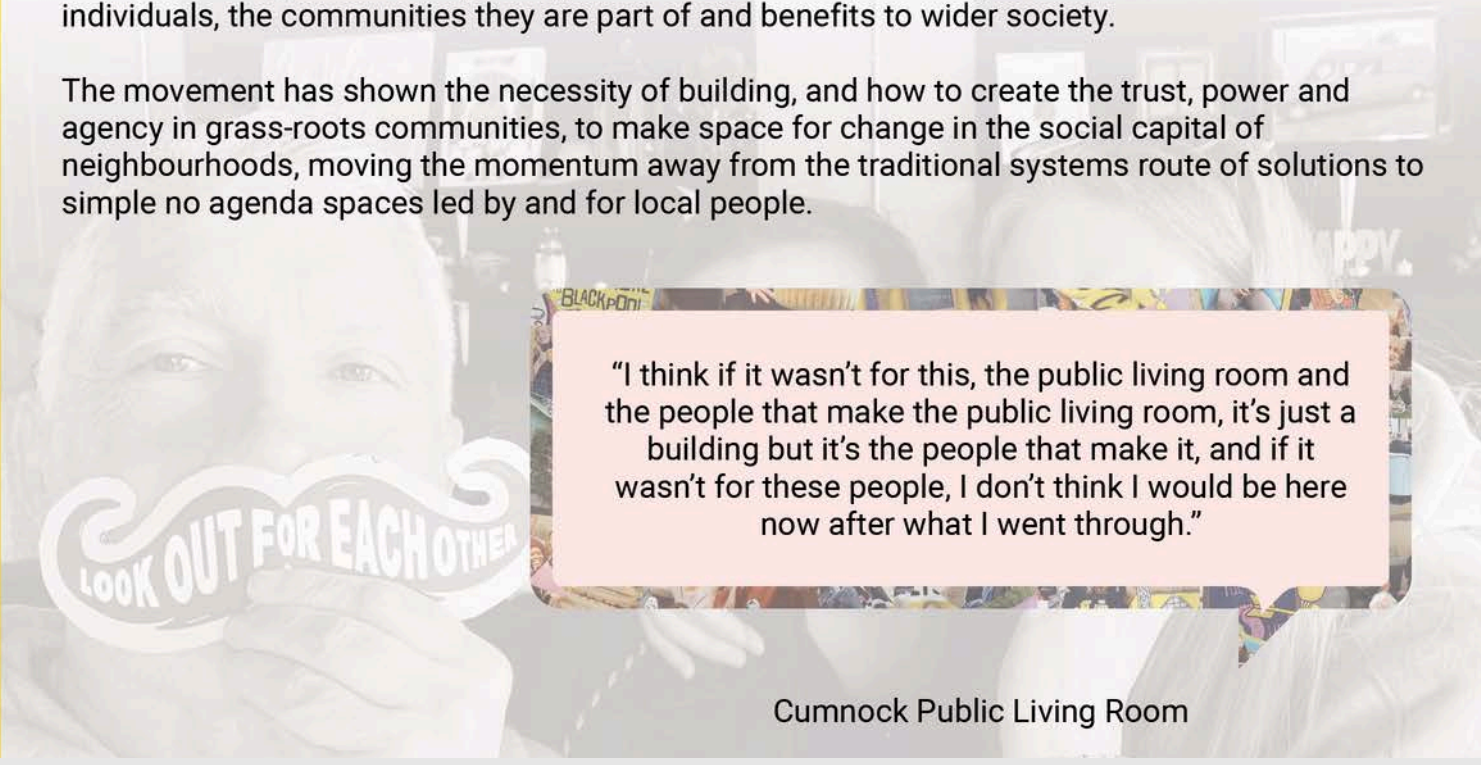
The healing power of Public Living Rooms



In the ten years since Camerados began, more than 350,000 visits have been made to Public Living Rooms.

This report looks at what has been learnt through the first ten years of a social movement established to get folk through tough times in their lives, what impact it has made to those individuals, the communities they are part of and benefits to wider society.

The movement has shown the necessity of building, and how to create the trust, power and agency in grass-roots communities, to make space for change in the social capital of neighbourhoods, moving the momentum away from the traditional systems route of solutions to simple no agenda spaces led by and for local people.



"I think if it wasn't for this, the public living room and the people that make the public living room, it's just a building but it's the people that make it, and if it wasn't for these people, I don't think I would be here now after what I went through."

Cumnock Public Living Room



The movement has got folk through tough times, by;

- Providing a space for social connection and increasing other social capital in communities;
- Which leads to a sense of purpose;
- Which enables people of diverse backgrounds to socialise together in an inclusive space;
- And so provides opportunities for peer support in a mutual non-clinical way;
- By using the principles, in and outside of Camerados spaces, which the movement states are meaningful to their lives.

In an era where social isolation is all too pervasive, Camerados helps us to reimagine what social connection looks, sounds, and feels like. This is vital in two ways: first, for building stronger, happier communities, and second, for developing an iterative approach to learning that helps understand and report how these changes occur.

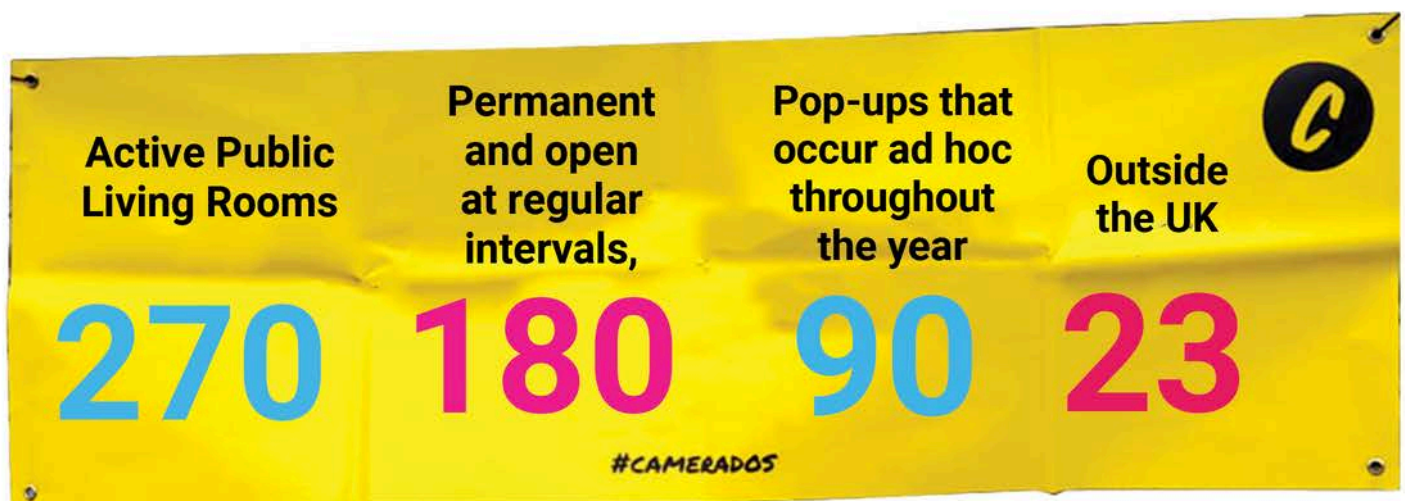
Public Living Rooms can be a lifeline for people facing tough times. While the form of these spaces varies from place to place, the core value remains: they offer a welcoming, non-judgmental space for connection and shared experiences. Some Public Living Rooms are more passive—operating like quiet refuges—and others actively engage people, creating opportunities for deeper involvement. Each Public Living Room and every camerado is unique, reflecting the true diversity of the people they serve. Regardless of their operation, all Public Living Rooms facilitate social connection and, without ‘fixing’ anyone, provide emotional support, showing how this model works to help individuals and communities thrive.

Dr Martha Newson University of Greenwich.



Since 2015 - **459** individual Public Living Rooms have been created.

As of April 2025:





A survey of the movement published in February 2024, reported that the Public Living Room had helped them to -

And that they liked the following about Public Living Rooms -



In 2024 and early 2025, 20 Public Living Rooms were visited for the collection of data, stories, ripple effect maps and/or observations. An opt-in survey of all Public Living Rooms in March 2025 gained 50 responses. The combined datasets from visits and the survey gave us the following overview of diversity within Public Living Rooms:





Introduction

The Camerados social movement gets people through life's tough times using radical mutuality, by creating 'friends and purpose' via grass-roots led, informal, non-charitable and non-clinical spaces in communities called 'Public Living Rooms'.

Public Living Rooms are unique places that create relaxed, non-judgmental spaces where people can come together to "look out for each other" without any expectation of formal advice, therapy, counselling, or onward referral. Instead, Public Living Rooms embody radical mutuality through encouraging individuals to engage in relationships that are reciprocal, non-hierarchical and empowering for all involved by using the six principles of what it means to be a Camerado to someone.

The Camerados movement is supported by the Association of Camerados (AoC) CIC, which inspires, resources and connects those in the movement across the UK and 5 other countries internationally, with the overarching aim of a 'Public Living Room in every neighbourhood'.

As of April 2025 there are **270** active Public Living Rooms, of these **180** are permanent and open at regular intervals, **90** are pop-ups that occur ad hoc throughout the year and **23** are outside the UK. The movement has grown hugely since the start of 2022, as the momentum to set up different types of community spaces post the COVID pandemic and during the cost of living crisis led to a **159%** increase in Public Living Rooms.

270

Active Public Living Rooms.

80

Are permanent and open at regular intervals.

90

Are pop-ups that occur ad hoc throughout the year.

23

Are outside the UK.

In total since the start of the movement in 2015, **459** Public Living Rooms have been created, including;

- During the testing period
- Spaces that closed but never reopened post the COVID pandemic
- The Human Hospitals project
- Pavement Public Living Rooms created by AoC as promotional activism

Key to the Camerados Movement are the six principles, which, when combined, create the conditions and ethos for people to look out for others in a radically mutual way, they are:

Ask someone who is struggling to help you.

- This principle is counter intuitive for those used to a more customary service or charity model, as it reverses the traditional model of acts of kindness, where the recipient may not always have the opportunity to reciprocate and therefore can feel shame. Instead, by being asked to do someone else a favour they are more likely to feel empowered, trusted and gain purpose.



Mix with people who are not like you.

- Mixing with people with different life experiences can challenge our thinking, broaden our minds, and make us less scared of each other. Public Living Rooms are open to anyone who wishes to attend, therefore encouraging those from different backgrounds to share experiences and create more understanding.



No fixing, just be alongside each other.

- This principle uses the power of 'lending an ear', acknowledging the person and being alongside them in difficult moments, and giving the person the opportunity to solve their own problems in a non-judgmental way.



It's ok to disagree respectfully.

- With increasingly diverse communities and polarised opinions, it is vital that we are able to disagree respectfully, in Public Living Rooms, continuing to discuss and enjoy one another's company is the desire, even if those involved in the discussion 'agree to disagree', thus no-one is excluded from the place because of their views.



It's ok to be a bit rubbish sometimes.

-The Camerados movement views Public Living Rooms as a place where there is freedom not to achieve, with no expectations placed upon you and any mistakes are accepted. Making Camerados spaces inclusive for those facing additional challenges who may often find themselves excluded from other community events.



To be silly is to be human.

- Having fun impacts our general wellbeing and including playfulness in activities can improve our relationships, make situations less intimidating, and help us to connect with others.





Approach to learning, our partners and methodology

Learning in an iterative way, with an active research structure, has been an integral part of the AoC's strategy since the beginning. Over 10 years, a number of learning partners have worked alongside the AoC and members of the movement to measure the impact of Public Living Rooms and what effect 'being a Camerado' has on individuals, organisations, communities and society. The active research cycle of gathering data, understanding it and then responding, means learning and evaluation is an on-going process. In this way, the movement can continue to reflect and change to enable growth and meet the needs of the movement.

A mixed methodology has been used to measure impact, by combining both qualitative and quantitative results from surveys, structured interviews, data recorders, observations and unsolicited feedback postcards. The learning approach also combined two other more untraditional research methods to capture impact; story collection (using the community report technique) and Ripple Effect Mapping.

The Community Reporting Technique, is an approach to lived experience story - telling that uses the insights to make positive social change. It allows people to tell their own stories, in their own ways via a peer to peer approach. The process has three phases, loosely based on the Cynefin framework for decision - making in complex environments, stories are gathered, curated and then mobilised to action change.

Ripple Effect Mapping is a participatory method technique for impact evaluation, specifically for community-based programmes/projects. It is designed to capture the 'ripples' of impact that are hard to measure by more traditional methods or that do not happen immediately. It involves people who are a part of the process/project reflecting upon and visually mapping intended and unintended changes.

A full list of reports with respective methodologies can be accessed via the QR code on the back page of this document.

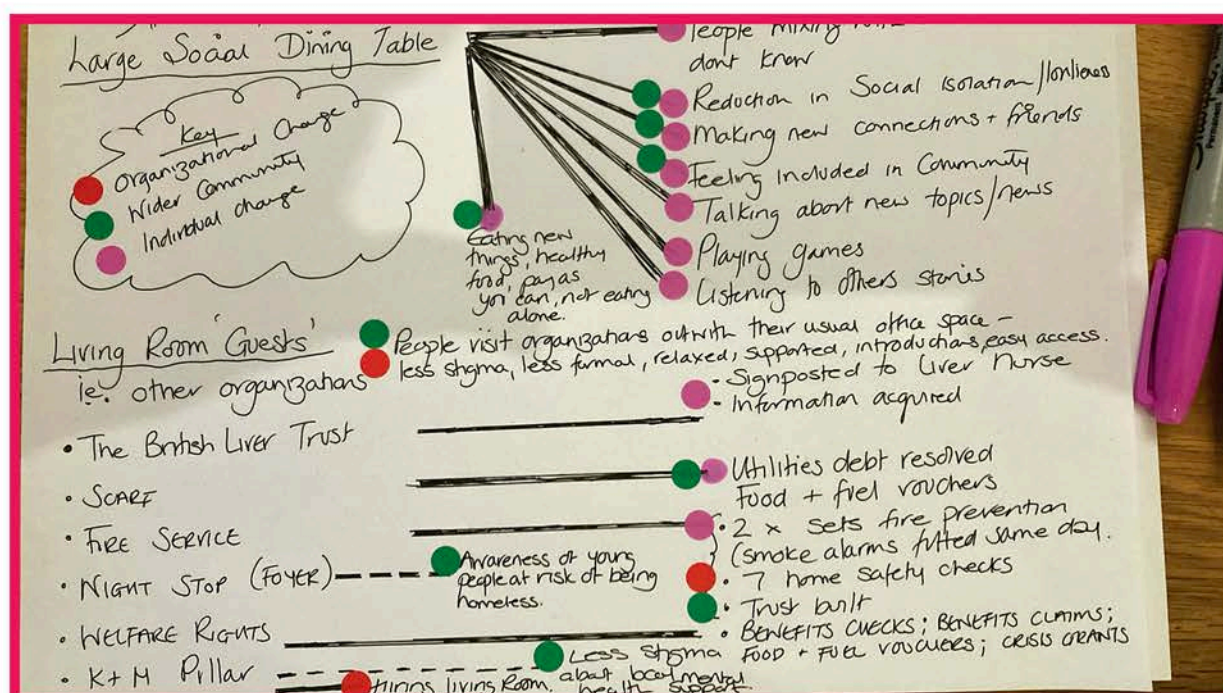


The 10 years of learning can be broken down into 4 main phases;

- Testing out ideas **2015 - 2018**
- The impact of Public Living Rooms in communities and hospitals **2018 - 2019**
- Impact of COVID and Camerados in Primary Schools pilot **2020 - 2021**
- Public Living Rooms and Camerados - the difference they make to tough times **2022 - present**



Over 10 years the research has collected the following qualitative and quantitative data:





2015

Camerados idea formed and created

2016 2017 2018

Testing period of Public Living Rooms in libraries, empty shops, a college, a cafe, street pop ups, neighbourhood kitchen events - design and trial of 1st Human Hospital and the public living room in a box kit in communities.



2018 2019

Human Hospitals project in 5 NHS hospitals, creation of the 2nd iteration of box resources for communities - by 2020 63 would be open.



2020 2021

COVID - lockdown all Public Living Rooms closed, movement went online. In two years 176 Spoonrooms, 4 house parties, 10 bit of company shows, 5 live events and 10 chat shows happened to keep the movement engaged. Street activism began in the summer of 2021 as restrictions lifted and some Public Living Rooms reopened.



2022 2023 2024 2025

Public Living Rooms began to reopen at pace and the request for boxes grows exponentially, due to need for connection and the cost of living crisis. By April 2025, 270 Public Living Rooms are in 6 countries.





Our learning partners

2015 - 2018

Dr Michael Little - Ratio Research CIC
Methodology: Era 3 Iterative Learning, focused on; reach, quality and impact. Using interviews, postcards, data recorders, collecting and recording stories.



2019 - 2020

Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
Methodology: Continuation of the methodology from Ratio Research.



Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research

2020 - 2025

Dr Hayley Trowbridge - People's Voice Media
Methodology: Community Reporting of lived experience, story collection, ripple effect mapping and sense making.



Dr Tessa Reardon - Oxford University
Methodology: Evaluation surveys, feedback postcards, interviews across 6 schools of 485 pupils in academic years 3 - 6 (age 7 to age 11) and their teachers.



Dr Martha Newson - Oxford University and University of Greenwich
Methodology: Observations, interviews, stories, data collection, academic roundtables.



What if someone like Samaritans ran Starbucks?

(Phase 1 - Testing out ideas, 2015-2018)

The Camerados movement was founded in 2015 by Maff Potts, after he recognised that social isolation contributed to poorer outcomes for individuals accessing support services he ran and how the outcomes could be different if those individuals had friends and purpose. Small-scale testing of a micro-business idea, created connections, but required a huge input, so another idea surfaced; What if someone like the Samaritans ran Starbucks? A different type of third space built on the concept of mutual aid.

Over 18 months, in 2016 - 2017, the AoC explored various ways to bring to life the concept and ethos of Camerados by piloting the idea of 8 different prototypes of these 'Camerados Cafes'. The cafe's idea would iterate and later become known as Public Living Rooms, after feedback from someone who attended the Blackpool prototype commented that the space was just like their living room.

During the testing phase the concept was held in a variety of locations from cafes to colleges, prisons to libraries and hospitals to empty shops. The prototype spaces were a mixture of; spaces operated by paid staff in a traditional organisational way and spaces run by whoever attended in a more mutual non hierarchical fashion.

During the 96 days that a test Public Living Room was open in Blackpool Victoria Hospital, **14,923** visitors were recorded using the space, an average of **155** visits a day and of these two fifths were repeat visitors. A survey showed us that **50%** of those using the Public Living Room were hospital staff, **29%** hospital visitors, **13%** patients and **8%** volunteers.

Additionally, the first iteration of a Public Living Room in a Box was created and sent out to 12 places, to see if a grass-roots led method of communities creating the spaces for themselves (through providing a set of starter tools) could act as a catalyst for change.



What we learnt about what worked

The results are discussed over the following pages and categorised by colour as follows:

Individuals/
communities

Organisations/
wider society

Mistakes made
along the way

Impact upon individuals and communities -

- **Mutuality in the Public Living Rooms was designed in from the beginning and at the core of their success. It was achieved through applying the principles, which creates the mix of folk attending and ensuring the no agenda and no judgement aspects are respected.**

"Everyone loves it, it's relaxing and you meet so many new people there and it's friendly. I have autism and I've made so many new friends who have the same condition and it means so much to me. I love being a part of Camerados."

Sheffield FE college Public Living Room

"When we had our art group, this guy came over and said 'what do I need to do to join in?' I said 'take a seat'. He looked at me and he went 'but I'm bisexual'. I looked at him and said 'And? Take a seat'. And then he said 'but I've got learning difficulties'. I said 'And?' And then he said 'but I can't really write' I said 'look we don't judge people here, just take a seat'."

Oxford Public Living Room

- Five of the six Camerados Principles were established, as a means to guide mutual and reciprocal behaviours within Public Living Rooms. At this point the principle about having fun was considered implicit in the atmosphere of the spaces, and a specific principle on it was not needed. This changed in later phases.

"You sit and feel very relaxed. You seem to talk like there's no effort. It's like a hub of human communication: talking, laughing and sharing problems with others"

Blackpool Hospital Public Living Room



"The Public Living Room is one of the only places where you can sit on your own and you're never on your own. Someone will always come and say hello."

Camden Public Living Room.

- The Public Living Room in a hospital provided a temporary space for everyone to escape the business of the environment, giving a space for respite and connection.

"I quite often feel lonely at work. The NHS is a lonely place. It's nice to know we are not alone and can support each other through the rough times in a place as cosy as this'.

Blackpool Hospital Public Living Room

"This is an excellent idea to connect people to people. Allowing them to safely touch, reach out comfortably to anyone in their area. It's a friendly way to join in life, momentarily going away feeling happier".

Blackpool Hospital Public Living Room.



Impact upon organisations and wider society -

- Camerados being a social movement of people instead of a service or organisation is beneficial. The differing prototypes highlighted that third spaces need to work hard to not drift into a service culture, keeping the mutuality present through it being run by everyone and not staff, shows that the movement approach worked better than a traditional organisational one.

"What a great idea. It helps to talk to other people with all the differing problems and traumas too. There is so many people with greater fears and problems, making lots of things look better when you put into perspective."

Blackpool Hospital Public Living Room

- Defining 'being a Camerado' as a characteristic of behaviour that embodies the principles. The people attending the Public Living Rooms themselves, turned just the name of the movement into a noun of something you could actively become by using the principles in your life.

"Camerados is like looking out for each other, backing each other up. I suppose you need a good listening ear to be a Camerado because if you didn't nobody would come and speak to you. Camerados, to me, is being there for other people and watching each other's back - protecting each other, watching out for each other and making sure everything is alright."

Blackpool Library Public Living Room.



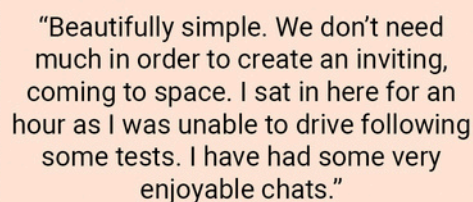


What we learnt from our mistakes

The 'It's ok to be a bit rubbish sometimes' principle applies to the AoC too and Phase 1 taught us a lot about the creation of third spaces, what principles can bring to a movement and how design influences the success:

- Power and money undermined mutuality in the space, so having staff and running a cafe was not the way forward. Staff in the space gives the impression that a Public Living Room is a service and creates hierarchy.
- To be silly is to be human - was not considered a principle in the beginning, until it was realised that some people needed permission before they felt they could have fun.
- Language matters, both in the description of the space and the behaviour expected within it, otherwise the place reverts over time from being mutual to a service. Using the principles as part of communicating in the spaces were important to maintaining the non service approach.
- Portable resource kits should not be in heavy wooden boxes no matter how beautiful the design!
- Public Living Rooms in larger organisations, although they may have a big impact in terms of numbers of people passing through them, were potentially more of a service delivery by AoC. Mutuality needs the movement to step up to create spaces themselves.

- Not everyone that asks to have a Public Living Room understands the ethos of the no agenda space, embodying the principles is important to maintain the mutuality.
- Just the design of the space allows connection to be fostered, the Public Living Room creates a feeling of warmth, cosiness and comfort, through furniture, lighting and messaging (or lack of) which was enough to intrigue people to enter and talk with others.



"Beautifully simple. We don't need much in order to create an inviting, coming to space. I sat in here for an hour as I was unable to drive following some tests. I have had some very enjoyable chats."

Blackpool Hospital Public Living Room



The Two Big Bets - Teepees V Boxes

(Phase 2 - The impact of Public Living Rooms in communities and hospitals , 2018-2019)

During 2018 and 2019 the AoC decided to build on Phase 1 learning, which indicated that pursuing Public Living Rooms in larger institutions (primarily hospitals and education) and through a network of communities, would enable the movement to grow. The Teepee's and Dome Public Living Rooms in hospitals, and disseminating Public Living Room in a Box kits, became the two concepts that the AoC decided to focus upon, whilst maintaining the principles and commitment to mutually.

The AoC partnered with a further 4 NHS Trusts in Rotherham, Tameside, Norwich and Middlesbrough to create Public Living Rooms in their hospitals as part of the Human Hospital project. During 2019, for periods of time varying from 3 to 6 months, the 4 trusts hosted Public Living Rooms in their foyers. Over a period of **459** days, **78,308** people attended the PLRs, equating to **171** people visiting per day.

A second iteration of a Public Living Room in a Box resources kit was created, a lighter more portable model with items within it that could create an instant Public Living Room by just adding people and furniture. The second iteration box was sent out to 68 locations by the end of 2019 for communities that had requested them to create Public Living Rooms run by the community.



What we learnt about what worked

The results are discussed over the following pages and categorised by colour as follows:

Individuals/
communities

Organisations/
wider society

Mistakes made
along the way

Impact upon individuals and communities -

- **60%** of people attending a Public Living Room felt that something had changed for them as a result of using it.

"Camerados literally saved my life. Even in my deepest suicidal moments I need only think of Camerados to stop myself sinking any further and doing harm to myself".

Community based Public Living Room

- The benefits of feeling more connected, happier, less anxious, less stressed and less alone were identified by more than **70%** of those who had experienced a change from using a Public Living Room.

"I felt stressed, on edge, I just needed a break. I had a long day at work and I wasn't ready to be stressed out, turning up at home to my family - I felt relieved and a lot more calm, as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I no longer was stressed and work felt long gone."

Tameside Hospital Public Living Room

- **68%** of people continue to visit the Public Living Room to feel more connected to others.

"I come here often to do some writing or reading or whatever but it's to come here in company, but also company that doesn't have an agenda or an aim or a goal... and you know that's the case, that's brilliant, that's important."

Community based Public Living Room

- Non-judgemental spaces help bring people of different generations and backgrounds together and by using the principles to be a deliberate space where people are alongside and mixing with others not like them, this fosters connection.

"I think the Camerados movement strikes a chord with many people.... Most of all, provision of a safe and inclusive space where all are welcome is the main attraction. It is helping our community start to become less atomized and individuals are finding a context for building relationships".

Community based Public Living Room



- The welcoming space is an important resource for those with mental health difficulties, vulnerable to loneliness and expressing stress. A place where nothing is expected of those that attend and the principles of 'no fixing be alongside' and 'it's ok to be a bit rubbish', give permission for this to happen.

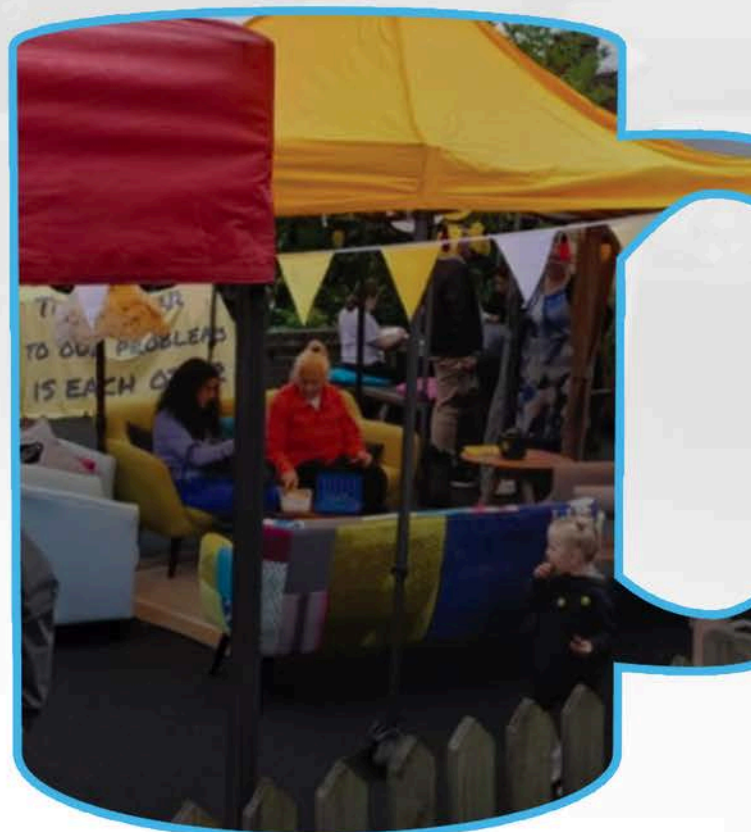
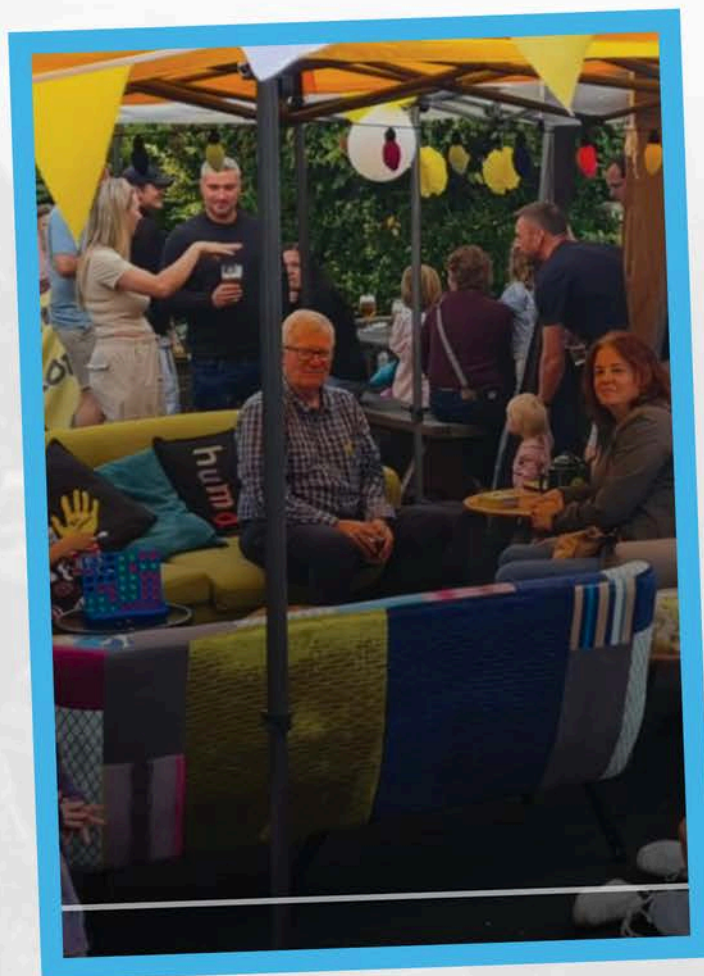
"It's been amazing, personally I have really struggled with mental health and this has become my sanctuary where I can escape and disappear into my own little world."


Survey Response 2019

- Embedding mutuality via the principles means that people in Public Living Rooms get help by being with, and talking to, others.

"I'm a carer and I find that I become quite socially isolated because of that so it's nice that I can focus on.... For a couple of hours a week, I can leave that all behind and I don't need to sit at home on my own and I just come along and have company and there's no pressure around it and it's just a relaxed atmosphere... it's nice to be able to connect with people"


Community Based Public Living Room





Impact upon organisations and wider society -

- **Public Living Rooms can improve communication in organisations by offering a non-threatening and calm place to meet. The non judgemental aspect of the space enables better conversations.**



"So I've had conversations with colleagues in the (Public Living Room) that I'm sure were very different from how they would have been if they'd been in a bit more formal settings"

Hospital based Public Living Room

- **The physical environment created, provides an opportunity for staff to relax and unwind in a busy organisation, the onward impact of this benefits society as staff feel refreshed in their demanding roles with patients.**

"Our Public Living Room has had the most superb impact upon our hospital - people connecting, people sharing, people feeling able to take a moment of solace amongst the chaos of the hospital environment and much much more! There are not enough words to describe how simple and yet so powerful the Public Living Room is - a much needed concept in our hospital!"

Survey response 2019



What we learnt from our mistakes

- Resources for Public Living Rooms need to be more clearly directed, as the principles are at risk of being diluted by organisations associated with specific agendas, such as mental health.
- The unsolicited feedback from postcards works well in large organisational settings but not in community spaces, where footfall is less and people are more identifiable.
- There should be more connections made between Public Living Rooms for shared learning. For instance to share ideas on promoting the space in local communities.
- To be a successful social movement and increase numbers, the AoC needs to continue to step back from delivery (AoC created the hospital spaces). The hospital work, although valuable, required too much input because of the bureaucracy involved with large institutions. The work with communities created the same impact with much less intervention and followed a movement model rather than service delivery.
- As the movement grows, keeping an oversight of Public Living Rooms by the AoC could become more challenging when wishing to follow the movement rather than operating an organisation model.

"They want it to be a movement but actually it's an organisation trying to be a movement because there is not enough movers moving at the minute"

Member of the Camerados movement



When in person connection became illegal!

(Phase 3 - Impact of COVID and Camerados in Primary schools pilot, 2020-2021)

By the end of 2019, the movement had begun to grow, however in March 2020 overnight, in-person connection around the world changed due to the COVID pandemic and for Camerados this meant the closure of all Public Living Rooms. The purpose of the movement paused. Being a social movement, though, proved to be an advantage, as the movement itself created the solution. Camerados helped to navigate this huge change by co-creating with the AoC, spaces online for folk to remain socially connected. These online meetings were in the form of SpoonRooms, House Party, OverABrew and a Bit of Company. The AoC also established a Camerados Mighty Network (a social media platform) for movement members to connect with each other directly.

The second part of the institution Big Bet, Education (suggested in Phase 1), had also been planned to be explored in 2020, with the thought that Camerado's Principles could help with the wellbeing of young people by influencing behaviour in schools. During the Autumn of 2020 the Camerados in Primary Schools pilot project commenced. Lasting the first half of the academic year 2020/21, it involved 6 Primary Schools across England in a mixture of urban and rural locations. The pilot

continued as planned despite the pandemic, with the aim to introduce the concept of Camerados, the principles and mutuality to KS2 children, to understand and test if they would be suitable for schools and have an effect on pupils' well-being. The Rotherham based School is still using the resources and ethos of Camerados and reports that it has continued to have a positive impact upon the entire School Community. In 2024 primary schools in Burnley and Lochgilphead also began using the tools.





What we learnt about what worked

The results are discussed over the following pages and categorised by colour as follows:

Individuals/
communities

Organisations/
wider society

Mistakes made
along the way

Moving the movement online during COVID Pandemic Impact upon individuals and communities -

- Online spaces improved accessibility and inclusion to joining the movement for many, particularly for those that had never been in a Public Living Room. The SpoonRooms ran like an online Public Living Room, the principles were shared in each call to enable mutuality to occur.

"Connection really is magic, and SpoonRoom was brilliant for me. Just that safe space. Not work, not supervision, not having to guard my thoughts. Just to be able to say what I wanted and be accepted"

Candice.

- Isolation during the pandemic had a negative effect on the mental health of many people. Many people expressed that if they had had a network of relationships in place beforehand it would have helped them get through that period more positively. Therefore the pandemic highlighted the need for spaces (like Public Living Rooms) where people could connect and build trusted relationships and via the principles mix with others to help them get through future tough times.


"I log on, wait for the screen to be filled with small boxes of people. Then we chat, listen, laugh and hold back theI'll come to that later. So a year on I've made friends with a wide range of people. I've also revealed my inner thoughts, ideas, and reflections on the week, life and which superpower would you have, amongst other serious and fun questions"

Iain.

- Losses during the pandemic and pausing of normality gave people time to re-evaluate what was important to them, whilst not directly linked to Camerados behaviour many in the movement shared their life reflections in the online spaces set up for connection.

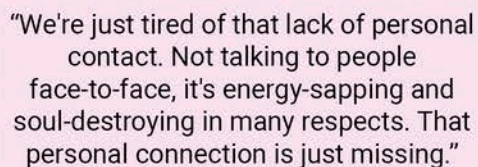
"When it started, I used to call what was happening The Great Pause. And then, remember hearing about how birds were returning to areas that they hadn't been in, the water was becoming clear, that emissions had dropped significantly in various parts of the world. It was almost like the world was just saying 'stop and pause'. And when that pause happened, life started to reappear."

Peter.



Impact upon organisations and wider society -

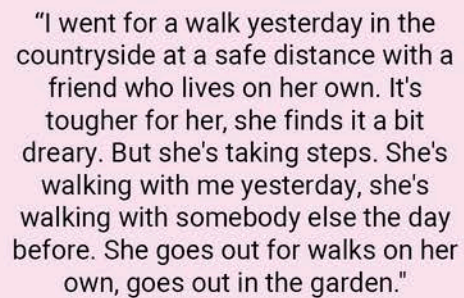
- Many people in the movement recognised the need for third spaces to be created when restrictions end, indoor and outdoor spaces re-imagined to make sure they are open to everyone, to give people the chance to socialise and connect with others.



"We're just tired of that lack of personal contact. Not talking to people face-to-face, it's energy-sapping and soul-destroying in many respects. That personal connection is just missing."

Candice

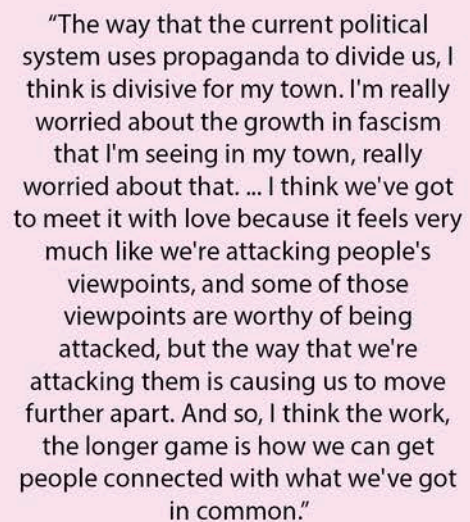
- More value needs to be placed upon creativity, from art, music, and nature to help with well-being, the online spaces in the pandemic gave people the chance to discuss what they hoped for in the future.



"I went for a walk yesterday in the countryside at a safe distance with a friend who lives on her own. It's tougher for her, she finds it a bit dreary. But she's taking steps. She's walking with me yesterday, she's walking with somebody else the day before. She goes out for walks on her own, goes out in the garden."


Gerry.

- Trust leads to real conversations that in turn lead to change because it bridges divides and increases tolerance and understanding. Giving people the opportunity through online and in person spaces to connect, held in a mutual way, gives difficult conversations a chance to happen.



"The way that the current political system uses propaganda to divide us, I think is divisive for my town. I'm really worried about the growth in fascism that I'm seeing in my town, really worried about that. ... I think we've got to meet it with love because it feels very much like we're attacking people's viewpoints, and some of those viewpoints are worthy of being attacked, but the way that we're attacking them is causing us to move further apart. And so, I think the work, the longer game is how we can get people connected with what we've got in common."

Angela.



Schools pilot

Impact upon individuals and communities:

The staff were extremely positive that by bringing in the Camerados' ethos to the school there was a wider benefit to the community, as well as the individual pupils, as Camerados could foster the behaviours of: understanding the need to include others in activities (especially those people ordinarily left out), respecting the wishes of other people, being kind in interactions with others and being there for others when needed. Staff specifically reported that the resources had equipped the pupils with the skills to be supportive and considerate of others, as well as being able to describe their own feelings and learning that it is actually alright to make mistakes. Finally, within the schools, staff found that there was shared unity in everyone (staff and children) being Camerados together.

"Helps build positive relationships"

"Children and staff have a shared identity of being a camerado"



72% of school staff said that Camerados had a benefit for the wider community.

54% of children think being a camerado is about inclusion and respect.

90% of children described being a camerado as helping, supporting and being there for other people.

39% of children think Camerados is about friendship and fun.

68% of children described a camerado as a kind person.

85% of school staff said a camerado was considerate towards others.

55% of school staff described being a camerado as providing help and support, and of these, more than a quarter specifically mention looking out for others and a fifth mentioned through tough times.

Impact upon organisations and wider society -

- Schools engaged well with the resources and principles of Camerados, with many positive experiences, although no overall change to wellbeing was evidenced, this may be attributable to the restrictions in place due to the pandemic and as has been widely reported, child well-being declined during this period of time, so the results are inconclusive.
- **31%** of school staff felt that the principles were powerful and a critical feature of the resources.
- **55%** of school staff described being a camerado as providing help and support, and of these, more than a quarter specifically mention looking out for others and a fifth mentioned getting through tough times.

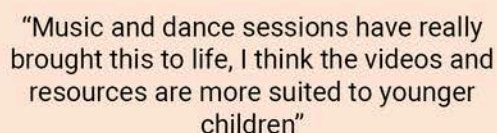
"It can create a happy inclusive environment where everyone is happy to be themselves"





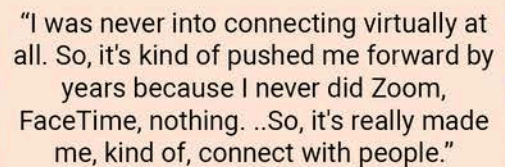
What we learnt from our mistakes

- A global pandemic is not the time to undertake a pilot in schools, this impacted upon the return of evaluation questionnaires, however this was very hard to change due to long lead-in times in education.
- Only one of the 6 pilot schools chose to continue with the Camerados ethos post the pilot, due to the pressures on schools following a global pandemic. This school though has embedded the principles across the school as core values and they are used by children and staff.
- Resources for schools need to include scaffolding of learning through the 4 year groups of KS2, especially around the language used within the principles to help with understanding. These changes were made when other schools spontaneously expressed an interest in introducing the concept to their schools in 2024.



"Music and dance sessions have really brought this to life, I think the videos and resources are more suited to younger children"

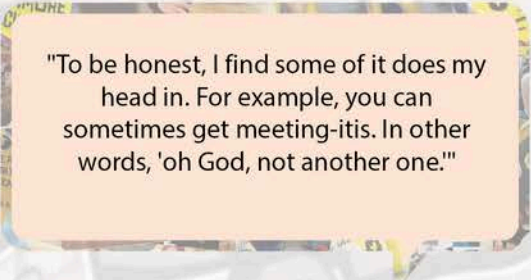
- Some people found joining online calls during the pandemic with total strangers difficult, and so the virtual world was not suitable for all.



"I was never into connecting virtually at all. So, it's kind of pushed me forward by years because I never did Zoom, FaceTime, nothing. ..So, it's really made me, kind of, connect with people."

Isaac.

- Maintaining the momentum of an online movement as the pandemic continued and people became tired of joining online calls. Returning to in-person social connection as soon as possible was important.



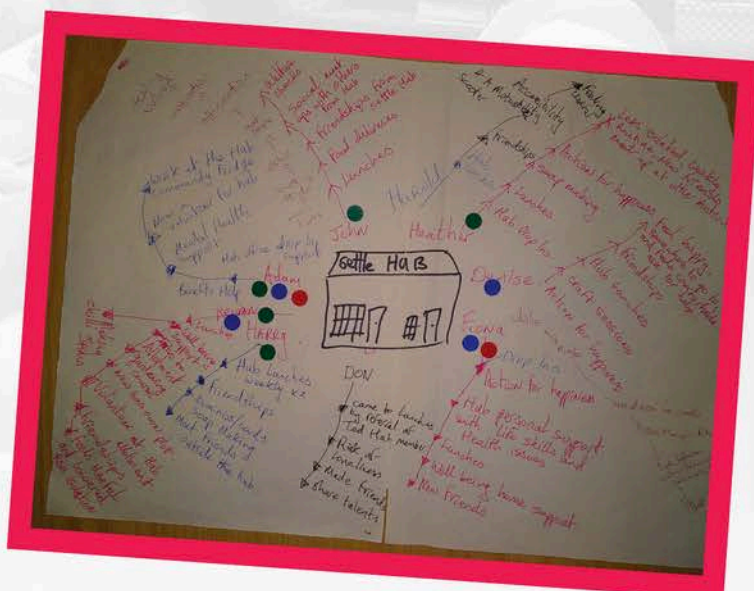
"To be honest, I find some of it does my head in. For example, you can sometimes get meeting-itis. In other words, 'oh God, not another one!'"

David.

(Phase 4 - Public Living Rooms and Camerados - the difference they make to tough times, 2022-2025)

they participate, the barriers to being able to join a Public Living Room such as anxiety, how to embed the principles more in the space and the dynamics of groups.

Phase 4 learning during 2022 - 2025, focused on finding out; what the movement thought of the principles, the ripples of impact of Public Living Rooms and ideas from the movement on how to grow, all alongside thinking about what being a camerado could mean more widely in terms of human behaviour. Also, understanding the difference between how much someone feels connected to the movement and how this influences how much





What we learnt about what worked

The results are discussed over the following pages and categorised by colour as follows:

Individuals/
communities

Organisations/
wider society

Mistakes made
along the way

Impact upon individuals and communities -

- A survey of the movement published in 2024, reported that the Public Living Room had helped them to -

90% feel more connected to others.

97% would recommend a Public Living Room to others.

67% feel less anxious or stressed.

85% feel happier.

57% feel more confident.

53% feel more able to cope with everyday life.

94% would recommend the movement to others.

Lived experience stories, observations and Ripple Effect Mapping told us that -

- The principles are extremely important and highly valued by those in the movement, they use them in the Public Living Rooms and many have taken them beyond the space to influence their interactions with others in their daily lives.

"We try to wear the principles like shoes, to ensure we are applying them in our daily lives"

Wigan Public Living Room.

"The idea of asking others to help you rather than how you can help them transforms relationships. Made a real difference in the way we work and how people connect with each other"

Survey free response 2024.

- Public Living Rooms enable connection with others and reduce isolation. These social connections generate a sense of belonging, improve confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing.

"I feel very socially isolated with being unwell for most of my life. That's really meant that I spend a lot of time on my own. It's wonderful to go to Camerados and see people, and chat and be sociable".

Online Story Exchange

"Today was my first time visiting a Public Living Room. I felt very welcomed and supported..... Thank you for accepting me as me".

Community based Public Living Room

"I hear voices every day, I have suicidal thoughts. In that moment being in that Public Living Room, being with people, all my problems go away. I feel so whole, I feel so well, I feel so empowered by the person, I feel like the person in front of me is giving me a gift, allowing me into their life."

Online story exchange

- The principles can influence individuals' values and lead to behavioural changes, this could be through trying out new activities, learning new skills, using the principles in their lives outside of the Public Living Room or being the catalyst for other community action.

"I really like the concept of Camerados. It appeals to me - the none institutional space, being alongside one another and being with people all over the world is a really magical space"

Online story exchange

"Two new community groups have been formed out of our Public Living Room, one for men and one for women. The men's group had created changes like Active Men activities, quizzes, hikes, gained funding and undertaken outreach to people experiencing homelessness and improved mental well-being. The Place for Women group has regular meetings, and offers peer support with Odd Arts and creatives".

Chorlton Public Living Room

- People feel a sense of purpose by attending or creating a Public Living Room.

"People with support lead and run the Public Living Rooms. The Camerados approach means that they lead the way, not the organisation's way. They experience a sense of purpose and a feeling that this is their space."

Warrington Public Living Room


"This isn't about fixing, this about being alongside and when we do that, we realise we can be together"

Online Story Exchange

"I just think everyone needs to be a part of something and for us as a family this is us".

Barry Island Public Living Room

- Individual impacts appeared to be particularly significant in vulnerable or less able populations, such as those with learning difficulties.



Impact upon organisations and wider society -

- A survey published in 2024 reported what people liked about Public Living Rooms -

70% agreed that they like the movement's mutuality and having a different approach from a charity/service.

73% feel less alone by attending.

64% come to meet other people and **63%** continue attending to meet others.

82% said that the message 'look out for each other' resonated with them.

In 2024 and early 2025, 20 Public Living Rooms were visited for the collection of data, stories, ripple effect maps and/or observations. An opt-in survey of all Public Living Rooms in spring 2025 gained 50 responses. The combined datasets from visits and the survey gave us the following overview of diversity within Public Living Rooms.

81.5% had attendees from more than one gender.

88% had attendees spread across multiple age ranges.

41.5% had more than one religion present among attendees.

52% had more than one ethnicity type present among attendees.

81.5% had attendees with a disability or long term health condition.

Lived experience stories, observations and Ripple Effect Mapping told us that -

- Camerados and the principles have influenced the internal values of multiple organisations, such as MacIntyre, through shifting attitudes of staff, perceptions of their role and relationship to others, with changes to organisational culture being a more relational approach.

"The Camerados approach has changed the attitude of staff. It makes them think about getting to know the people around them, being part of that community, being chatty. Other organisations have been inspired to start their own Public Living Rooms."

Warrington Public Living Room

"They adopt the Camerados principles in how they act as health champions: they aren't there to fix people, they focus on having fun and meeting people they don't normally get to meet, building community. Creating the Public Living Room as a space to build community. They place a lot of emphasis on 'being people first'".

Milton Keynes Public Living Room

- **Camerados brings people together from different backgrounds, the principle of mixing with folk not like you is brought to life in the spaces, for example; refugees and travellers in York, homeless and local residents in Glasgow, those with addictions and mental health difficulties in Cumnock, 8 nationalities in Rochdale and the elderly with young families in Chester.**

- **Camerados has brought communities together, with the provision of new free third spaces for people to be able to gather in a way that does not feel like a service, leading to decreased social isolation and the no fixing principle is central to people wanting to attend.**

"We're in a highly diverse area with 100 different languages spoken in 4 sq miles - we were finding it difficult to mix people up. A Public Living Room is how you mix people up".

Gatis Wolverhampton Public Living Room

"What I get from Camerados is very much that human space, the feelings that you can change the conversation and you can change that institutional approach to things. It's not about fixing, it's okay to fail".

Online story exchange

"Usually from my experience, if you dress a certain way then people judge you, I don't think I felt this with this group at all."

Online story exchange

"For the people who come along it's enjoyable....[The Impact] From being part of the Public Living Room is they can learn from each other and be more human - their diagnosis isn't the forefront of interactions. They're just there to meet people".

Lochgilphead Public Living Room

"I've met people from different walks of life and it didn't matter whether they were rich or poor or in the middle... they were all so interesting."

Online story exchange

- **There is an increased volunteer base and opportunities for fundraising. People attending the Public Living Room have also been inspired to go on to create other spaces for their community such as art and walking groups.**

"A person whose journey took them from coming to the Public Living Room to get food, to acting as a volunteer. People saw they had a good rapport with young people, and they were already DBS checked so they asked her to get involved with the youth club".

Gatis Wolverhampton Public Living Room

"A Camerado started coming to the hub drop in twice a week. Now she is queen and chief leader of the 'soap-making', she gives her time back to the hub and her time to involved other people - she fundraises for the hub to support the soap-making."

Settle Public Living Room

- **Public Living Rooms inspire connections with other groups, particularly like-minded people, leading to wider social changes in neighbourhoods through more social capital.**

"Conversations have come about which have led to improvements in local park spaces"

Wigan Public Living Room

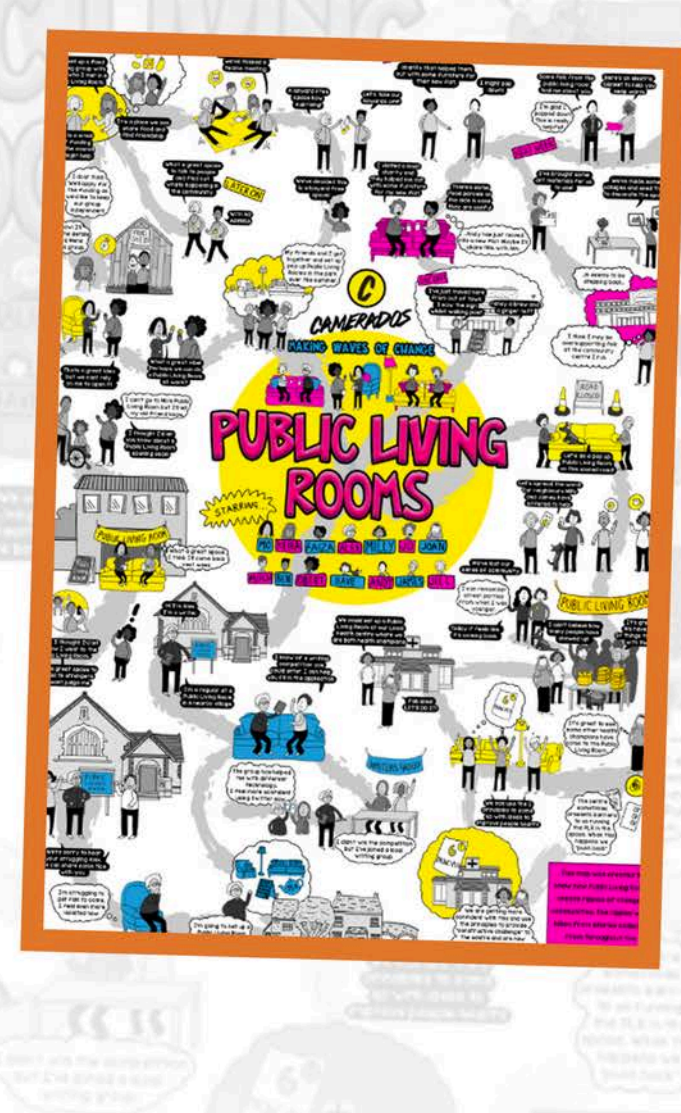
"We've started the infrastructure of an actual community centre being built on the estate. Planning and money generation is taking place to help create a proper community centre. Thanks to the trust being built up over time people would use it. Sometimes you'll get a new building but no one wants to use it because the trust isn't there, but hopefully the Public Living Room will help lay the ground level of a vibrant community centre that gets used. The plan is that the people that have been coming to the Public Living Room and others on the estate help us build it."

Online story exchange



- During this phase the AoC tried to get the movement together at a large-scale campfire gathering on two occasions: both failed, due to various factors including the cost of living crisis, though it did eventually succeed in November 2024 and 50 Camerados from 22 Public Living Rooms attended. An annual campfire continues to be a focus for the movement to connect and learn. The AoC created the idea of Camerados Shindigs so the movement could get together more locally (as a response to the failed campfires) with individual Public Living Rooms holding these for their communities to experience the space.
- The Camerados Council was set up to act as a form of governance for the AoC in 2019 to ensure the movement stayed on mission, made up of movement members it ran well for the first 3 years. However, unintentionally this created a hierarchy of Camerados and so in December 2022 the decision was taken to change the governance model to one that is more inclusive and Open House meetings began quarterly. Now anyone in the movement helps govern the direction of the mission.
- Understanding what the principles mean to diverse cultures requires more thought as the movement grows (Camerados is now present in 6 countries outside of the UK), in particular the principle of 'mixing with folk not like you', and how this might work in communities where culture differences make this difficult.

- Even though not all who attend the spaces know that they are in a Public Living Room or realise it is part of a global movement, if the principles are embedded people still get through tough times.
- Find a way to keep momentum in Public Living Rooms that have been open a while, encourage check-ins with AoC and help with promotion so that connection with the principles is maintained.



What did our learning tell us about how to grow a social movement?

Over the past ten years the AoC has also learnt, through successes and mistakes, strategies for growing a social movement and in particular one built on radical mutuality;

- **Being iterative** and learning as you implement ideas, means that you can change direction to meet the needs of a movement as well as keep those involved central to your mission. By changing our focus to 'a Public Living Room in every neighbourhood' rather than one 'Big Bet' strategy, the movement grew by 159% in one year.



- **Follow the good energy**, and adopt a pull strategy rather than pushing at closed doors - focus time on the early adopters and those who are keen, later adopters will be attracted once they can see the value. Early adopters like Community Corner in Wigan, have shown the value of Camerados to their community and the concept has since been adopted by a local school, the library and another community group in the town.



- **Think about how to involve the movement in decision making and challenge**, create an open process where anyone can join and give their opinion, and most importantly show in action that those opinions have been valued. Creating a Camerados Council was the first attempt at this process of "support and challenge" to the central AoC team. Although it had some positive meetings and great ideas ultimately it didn't last as the group struggled with the "challenge" aspect. To our surprise people are so afraid to offend and criticise that this undermined the group's effectiveness. Also it unintentionally created a hierarchy within the movement and people felt uncomfortable with having a greater voice than others. Open House (an open zoom meeting) is now the meeting held once a quarter where anyone from the movement can join and participate in discussions. Open House meetings have led to decisions on community resources, media campaigns, how to celebrate our 10th anniversary, commitments on social media and possible changes to our principles.



- **Be flexible with commitment and avoid guilt and compulsion!** It's important to allow folk to participate with the movement as it fits with their life and give options for that to happen, so more people can feel part of it, it became clear that people liked the Camerados movement but some were unable to commit to setting up a Public Living Room. However people can also just wear the badge to signal they are part of the movement and use the principles in their everyday life, this avoids any sort of compulsion or guilt in "not doing enough", and allows people to do what works for them.



- **More "glue" and not "super glue".** Studies in human behaviour tell us that people do like to feel part of a group and depending on the nature of it, this influences how socially bonded to it they become. The Camerados movement has learnt that being overly socially bonded (identity fusion - "social super glue") can cause people to become so passionate that they are extremely loyal to the movement and its mission, but sometimes this also drives behaviours that can be destructive to relationships. For a movement based on relationships, a better balance is a more loose social glue (identification) that creates a sense of belonging and desire to participate. The Camerados movement is not after fundamentalists who seek perfectionism, instead it is after people to fully embrace the crapness of human behaviour, give people slack and no shouting in community kitchens! (See below on hierarchies)



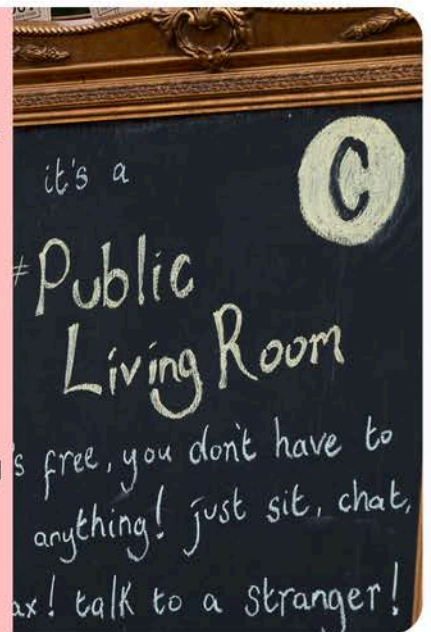
- **You need some principles to re-educate us on hierarchy and being human.** If you want human behaviour to change, be clear how individuals can implement that change. Camerados found that radical mutuality comes naturally to some, however, in many of the sectors folk turn to for support, reciprocity in relationships is not normalised; many folk resort to a more traditional dynamic of charity involving someone being the helper, and others the helped. Camerados has developed the 6 principles as an aid to remind those in the movement how to keep the interactions in Public Living Rooms mutual and everyone looking out for each other. The promotion of the principles is an ongoing task to ensure they are present and known about in Camerados spaces.



- **When we organise hierarchies just happen.** Consider whether hierarchy is important and how to manage power imbalances, as these will happen, because when people organise events or spaces they like to systemise and organise in a way that creates them. Uneven power dynamics were experienced in our trial spaces, using mutuality helped to remove these. So that everyone is able to contribute, folk have to be intentional in the use of the principles to enable for more equal space. For example the “asking someone to help you” principle is key here and can mean that instead of a hierarchy there are roles to be fulfilled and shared. However the movement acknowledges that there is always one person or group of people who tend to spark the creation of a community’s Public Living Room and these folk can provide leadership in growing the movement in places where it’s not currently present. However a constant vigilance about hierarchies is key - for example in our early years, cafes created a transactional relationship and killed the mutuality in a space. A counter, a till, a financial exchange...it separates us into staff and customer and entitlement and expectation replace a natural trend to look out for each other, mutually and on the level.



Elders and ambassadors. Use those already in your movement to tell others about it for you. Elders and ambassadors are quite traditional ways to spread movements, using the wisdom of those who have done it before to teach others. AoC tried to create Camerados own set of ‘elders’ known as the ‘profiteroles’ (made sense at the time!) from those in the movement who had been involved the longest, to give additional voices to the movement at speaking events. Whilst the idea was strong it did feel like a layer of hierarchy and the movement itself was growing without this approach. The idea changed to a more movement wide, peer support and knowledge exchanging on Mighty Networks plus fellow Camerados holding community calls with new Public Living Rooms and those needing advice, instead of the AoC team. The AoC intends to build on this network of peers to further scale the movement in coming years.



Be intentional about including and promoting to different demographics, ethnicities and cultures. The Camerados movement is fortunate that it is diverse, although this can always be improved upon and we are trying to understand the barriers to joining or attending a Public Living Room, so we can be more intentional in our messaging to ensure anyone from any background can envisage themselves as a camarado. This process has started with roundtable discussions made up of people in and new to the movement to discover their opinions on the principles and concept.



- **Give permission** to those in your movement to self organise and use their own initiative, and ensure that people know your permission is not essential for action to happen. This initiative may not happen naturally as many people think in an organisational way, which involves a hierarchy of decision making. The motivation of the movement is vital if it's to become sustainable and spread. The Camerados movement has one basic 'ask' of members and that is whatever they do or create, must align with the 6 principles so you have radical mutuality, everything else is for them to decide.



- **Create connections between your movement members** beyond their normal meeting place to foster a greater sense of being part of a wider group, make them fun, engaging and informative. Camerados has found that connection through our Campfires (in person and virtual), Open House, Mighty Network chat groups, local shindigs and newsletters/zines, enables individuals from Public Living Rooms across the globe to engage with one another. Although the AoC knows there is more work to be done to improve these connections as not everyone who attends a Public Living Room realises that they are part of a wider network.



- **Consider creating a ritual that people can follow.** Admittedly Camerados is still trying to understand what our ritual is that happens in every Public Living Room when they are open. Rituals can be very basic, such as always putting on the kettle and using the Camerados teapot, to much more elaborate, like a game, music or event. Our main rituals are the Camerados Campfires (virtual and in person), they happen annually and are an opportunity for the entire movement to take part. Though perhaps just Public Living Rooms are a ritual in themselves.



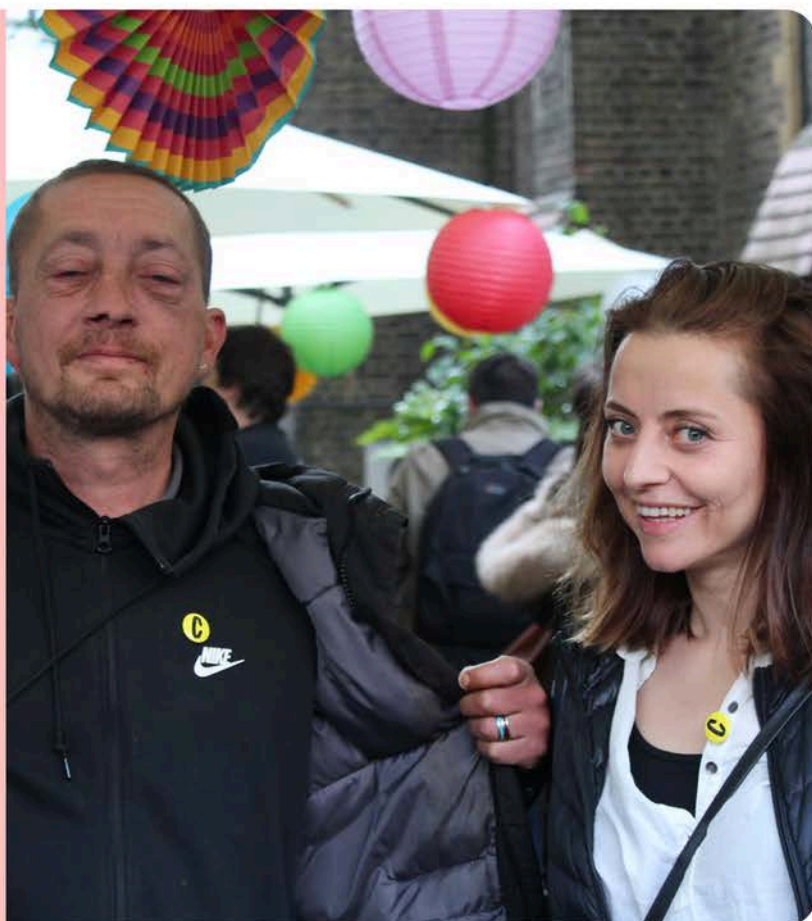
- **Look at the thresholds people will need to cross** to enter any new space or event you create, there could be a barrier (physical or metaphoric) to people participating. It can take some time for trust to build so that people feel that they can enter a space they have not experienced before, many of our new Public Living Rooms start outside as this allows people a chance to observe and join in without opening a door. Indoor spaces can be harder to enter, going through a door, the unknown on the other side, so it can be helpful to have Public Living Rooms alongside other activities such as clothes swaps, art clubs or food pantries to make them more visible.



Accept that quality will vary. A key difference with the movement model over the organisational model of social change is that there is no way of inspecting quality. In organisations you hire staff and review their performance, you also might have some indicators against which you inspect the quality of delivery. In a movement it is open source, let go and more like seeds on the wind - some will take root and flourish, others won't. Out of the current 270 Public Living Rooms perhaps 30 of them may not really fit with the principles and working well, that's unknown and the price of being a movement. The upside is that growth is exponential and at the speed of trust and wholly owned by people in their own neighbourhood.



Be generous, not defensive about copy cats. Many people have copied our ideas, sometimes even using the same language and even remarkably similar branding(!). However we cannot be proprietary about good ideas. If people adapt and use them how it fits them then that's a good thing. It's better there is more good stuff in the world, anything to help counter the opposite narrative. To close down others adaptations is against the idea of movements and a generous spreading of ideas. In the end Camerados actively sought to promote and encourage movements with no attachment to our own. For example we sent out chocolate bars with wrappers saying "The work you do in your community is brilliant" to simply encourage a warmer, more positive atmosphere in our "sector".



.....and remember, mistakes are alright, the AoC has made plenty, they have taught us what our movement wants, likes and needs more than the successes!





Conclusions -

key learning themes



Several key consistent themes have emerged from the data collected across the 10 years of learning about Public Living Rooms and the Camerados movement. Pre-, during and post-the COVID pandemic, the experiences of those being part of the movement or visiting any Camerados spaces show an overwhelmingly positive impact upon individuals, communities, organisations and society at large, in summary they help people get through tough times by:

- Providing a space for social connection and increasing other social capital in communities;
- Which leads to a sense of purpose;
- Which enables people of diverse backgrounds to socialise together in an inclusive space;
- And so provides opportunities for peer support in a mutual non-clinical way;
- By using the principles, in and outside of Camerados spaces, which the movement states are meaningful to their lives.

"Camerados is such a brilliant movement because it's not the system. It's not something I've been stuck in all my life. It's not something I wanted to die in. It's not something I've felt helpless in and it's not something that I felt hopeless in. This is what I felt like in services."

Online story exchange

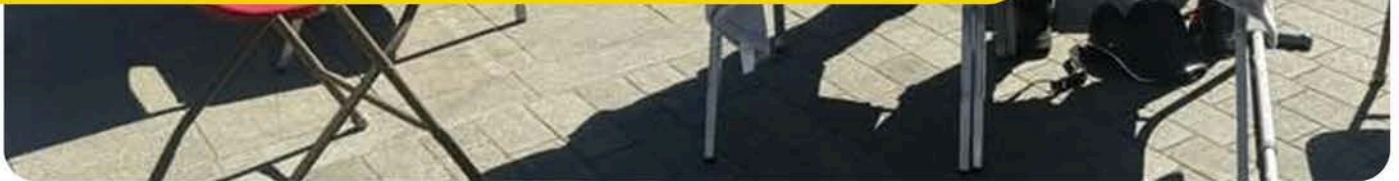
"just presents a space, it gives people a space where they can just come along and there's no pressure to be anything, there's no pressure to do anything. You can just be yourself."

Online story exchange.

In an era where social isolation is all too pervasive, Camerados helps us to reimagine what social connection looks, sounds, and feels like. This is vital in two ways: first, for building stronger, happier communities, and second, for developing an iterative approach to learning that helps understand and report how these changes occur.



Public Living Rooms can be a lifeline for people facing tough times. While the form of these spaces varies from place to place, the core value remains: they offer a welcoming, non-judgmental space for connection and shared experiences. Some PLRs are more passive - operating like quiet refuges - and others actively engage people, creating opportunities for deeper involvement. Each Public Living Room and every camerado is unique, reflecting the true diversity of the people they serve.



Regardless of their operation, all Public Living Rooms facilitate social connection and, without 'fixing' anyone, provide emotional support, showing how this model works to help individuals and communities thrive.

The Camerados movement is creating space where social connections didn't exist before. Many individuals who previously felt isolated or lonely have formed lasting friendships, and entire communities have bonded through Camerados-inspired, person-led events. This sense of connection has fostered more confident communities with a strong foundation—the movement's principles that revolve around mutual support, and a light touch sense of humour, acting as the social "glue".

This exceptional ability to forge social connections where none previously existed is particularly well evidenced during and after COVID-19 lockdowns, when Camerados was a vital source of connection and levity in online spaces, with many attributing their personal survival to its core values. The life-changing - and indeed, life-saving - power of Camerados is evident in the participant voices that emerge through the research, as well as in its capacity to create lasting social connections and strengthen communities.

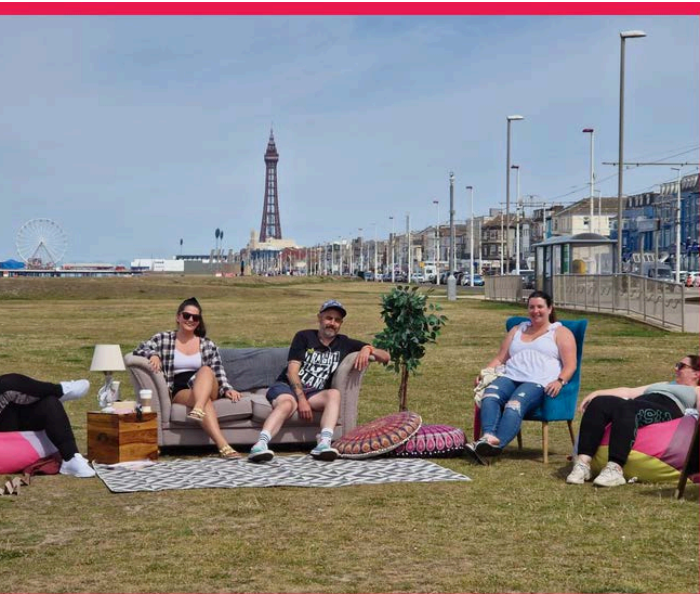


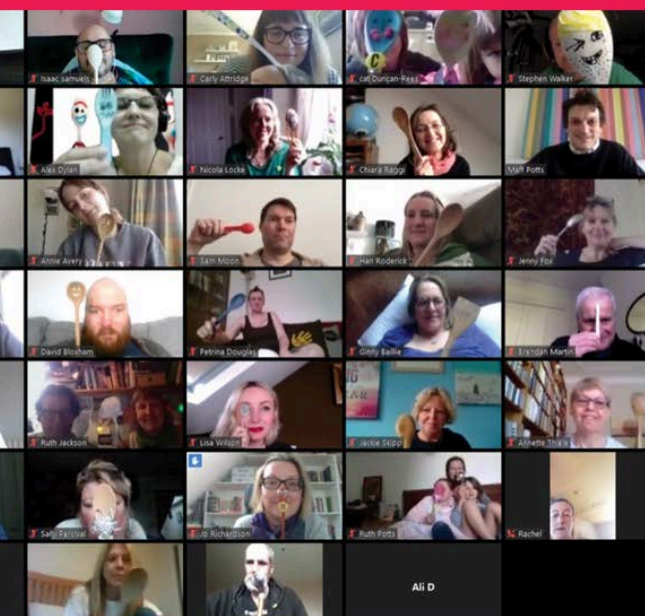
In my three years of working with Camerados, I have been struck by their open, cyclical approach to research—one that builds iteratively on findings to drive change both within the movement and in the broader community. The methodologies chosen are sensitively tailored to support and reflect the needs of movement members, many of whom may be vulnerable. Through its work with multiple learning partners, AoC has evidenced that the principles ripple outwards with evidenced effects on individuals, communities, organisational culture, and even the broader societal fabric. Their thoughtful approach to research not only supports the movement's members and the Public Living Rooms, but also lays a strong foundation for future research that is likely to influence other third sector practices.

Today, as the movement continues to experiment with new ideas to bring people together, Camerados seems uniquely positioned to offer a sustainable solution to the challenge of 'tough times' at a societal level. This enduring impact, coupled with a thoughtful approach to research, reinforces the fact that Camerados is not merely responding to current challenges but is actively shaping a more connected future.



Dr Martha Newson, Founder of Newson Consultancy; Leader of the Changing Lives Lab Group; Associate Professor in Psychology, University of Greenwich







For details on the documents referenced in this report, please visit
The Brain on camerados.org

