



Fieldwork Diary

**North London Cares and South London
Cares Evaluation**

John Hitchin, Olivia Petie, and Amanda Norrlander

April 2019

Introduction



Renaisi was commissioned at the start of 2018 to undertake an impact evaluation of The Cares Family to help them demonstrate how they are meeting their core objectives. The Cares Family commissioned this work to capture, track and analyse the impact of their work in each of its specific city locations and as a group. This first part of Renaisi’s evaluation focused on the two more established organisations, North London Cares and South London Cares.

Due to challenges encountered previously when using different methods for collecting data with older neighbours at The Cares Family, Renaisi employed an embedded researcher to attend social clubs and visit those involved with North London Cares and South London Cares’ Love Your Neighbour programme in their homes to complete the surveys with older neighbours face-to-face. The researcher conducted fieldwork over a five-month period –attending a total of 58 social clubs and visiting 18 older neighbours in their homes across north and south London. This approach was taken to help increase understanding of the purpose of data collection, establish relationships and build rapport, and to take a more conversational approach to quantitative data collection.

Whilst undertaking the fieldwork, the embedded researcher kept a detailed fieldwork diary of observations, reflections and interactions. As the fieldwork progressed, the embedded researcher regularly shared reflections with the wider research team – leading to changes and adaptations in the approach. This document draws on the research diary kept by the researcher, and consequent reflections from the wider research team on the implications this had for the research approach. Other documents provide detailed information on our methodological approach and the findings of this research.

This diary highlights three different kinds of findings as the project progressed:

- Reflections
- Implications
- Experiences

Meet the research team



Embedded Researcher – Amanda Norrlander



Amanda joined Renaisi in May 2018 as a **Project Officer** in the team and is involved with a variety of research and evaluation projects. During the period of July to October 2018 Amanda worked closely on the evaluation of The Cares Family as the embedded researcher. This involved focussing on capturing, tracking and analysing the impact of their work through North London Cares and South London Cares.

Project Manager – Olivia Petie



Olivia is an experienced field researcher and **Project Manager** at Renaisi, with expertise in a wide variety of methodologies. She has been involved in delivering a range of evaluation and research projects since being at Renaisi.

On this evaluation, Olivia had oversight of the day to day management of the project, including liaising with The Cares Family team, and regularly communicating progress. She also supported Amanda in the embedded researcher role, leading on key decisions around the approach.





Project Director – John Hitchin



John is Renaisi's **Chief Executive**, responsible for our strategic direction and our work on learning and system change, alongside the development and support of new services within the organisation. He is an experienced researcher, strategist and facilitator.

John was responsible for supporting the project team at key stages of the evaluation with advice and guidance, inputting on key elements such as the methodological approach and final reporting.

July

	Attended 10 social clubs with South London Cares		43 surveys completed face-to-face		22 paper surveys filled out
	Pub Club, Ballroom & Latin Dancing, Quiz Club, Yoga, World Cup Party, Bird Watching and Pond Dipping in Hyde Park, Desert Island Discs, Hand Cream Workshop at the Garden Museum, Choir and Creative Writing				

Reflections from the field

After spending time setting up the project and establishing contact with The Cares Family team, we began our data collection period in July 2018. We discussed the research plan with the team, and it was decided that we should start the fieldwork at South London Cares – North London Cares had a new Social Club Coordinator starting in July and so it was felt that it would be best to give them time to settle into their role first. I first received a list of all the social clubs in July from the South London Cares team and then pulled a random sample of clubs to go to, with approximately 2-4 clubs a week.

My very first South London Cares club was the Pub Club at The Old Red Lion in Kennington. After a swift cycle ride from Hackney, I arrived 30 minutes before the club started as The Cares Family team told me many of the older neighbours like to arrive early. I also wanted to make sure I had enough time to set up my laptop and have a chat with the Social Club Coordinator about the best approach to take in this club. Having done lots of preparation, I still felt quite nervous to begin the fieldwork as I was not entirely sure what to expect or how it would go. Luckily, the Social Club Coordinator greeted me with a big smile and a hug when I entered the pub and made me feel very welcome and comfortable in the space.

Observation notes: Celebrating birthdays

During an excursion to Hyde Park to do some Bird Watching & Pond Dipping, it was an older neighbour's birthday. The Social Club Coordinators brought out a muffin with a candle in it and got everyone in the room to sing 'Happy Birthday'. One of the Coordinators gave her a big hug afterwards, and the older neighbour looked really pleased – it was lovely to see the smile on her face.

The Cares Family team's advice paid off, and as expected some older neighbours arrived as early as I did that first evening to The Old Red Lion. As the neighbours were arriving, I handed out a couple of paper surveys before I sat down to do my very first face-to-face survey with an older neighbour. The Coordinator welcomed everyone to the pub and greeted them by their first names, which was really heart-warming. She directed everyone to seats and I noticed that she was trying to mix older and younger neighbours as much as possible by encouraging them to sit next to each other.

After having completed around 20 face-to-face surveys in the first week of fieldwork, I was feeling more relaxed and excited about the task which lay ahead. I was surprised by how open the older neighbours were with me and I had the great privilege to hear personal stories about anything from things such as losing a family member, the ups and downs of growing old, through to memories of being a rock star in the 60s! However, during these first days of fieldwork, I found that a few questions were not interpreted as we had hoped. For example, I was surprised how many of the older neighbours reacted negatively to the question, ‘What proportion of your friends have a similar level of education to you?’ Some of them seemed upset and said it was inappropriate to ask that type of question and that it made them feel uncomfortable. Due to this, I gave them the option to not respond at all as the last thing I wanted to do was to make them feel uneasy.

Implications for the research

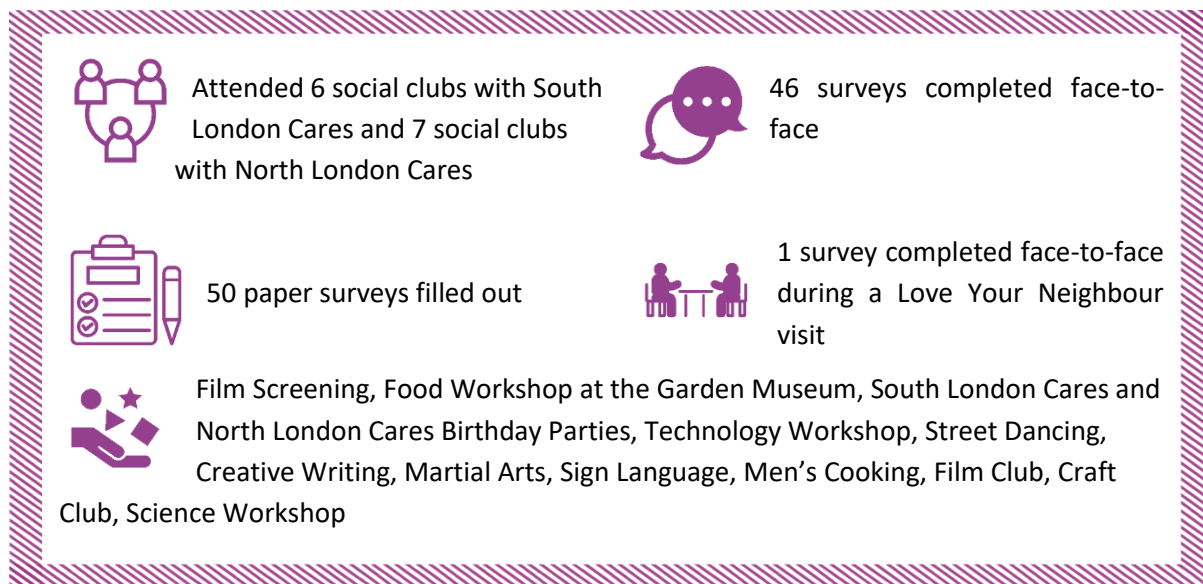
Throughout the first month of the fieldwork, we learnt a lot about using the approach of an embedded researcher in gathering data within this setting. Amanda was continuously learning and reflecting on what worked, and how best to engage people in a positive and sensitive way. There were three main things we learnt and adapted in the first month:


Firstly, certain things appeared to work in engaging older neighbours – such as arriving early, and having a member of staff make introductions. But more than practical elements, it appeared to be the personal and human approach which mattered most. Amanda soon came to recognise that some conversations would take 10 minutes, and others may take an hour – we would need to be adaptive to this in our research approach.


Secondly, language and context are important and some of the questions needed to be adapted to make sure they were suitable in this context and with this group. We tweaked some of the survey questions to make sure they were understood correctly, for example clarifying that by ‘neighbour’ we meant those living near you – rather than ‘neighbour’ as used by The Cares Family to describe participants in their activities. We also added the a ‘don’t know’ option to certain questions where this was frequently being given as a response from neighbours.


Finally, when evaluating community-based services, maintaining their ethos and approach matters. Whilst we had tried where possible to use survey questions used in other data sets to allow for comparability, as a result of the discomfort in answering some of the questions in the survey we decided to try different questions. For example, we removed the question, ‘What proportion of your friends have a similar level of education to you?’. This question was designed to be a proxy for understanding bridging social and attitudinal divides, and so we decided to replace it with ‘What proportion of your friends voted the same way as you in the EU referendum?’. Surprisingly, this new question evoked fewer negative emotions; however we found that most older neighbours said that they didn’t know.


August




 Attended 6 social clubs with South London Cares and 7 social clubs with North London Cares

 46 surveys completed face-to-face

 50 paper surveys filled out

 1 survey completed face-to-face during a Love Your Neighbour visit

 Film Screening, Food Workshop at the Garden Museum, South London Cares and North London Cares Birthday Parties, Technology Workshop, Street Dancing, Creative Writing, Martial Arts, Sign Language, Men's Cooking, Film Club, Craft Club, Science Workshop

Reflections from the fieldwork

This month I started to also attend social clubs in north London and completed my first Love Your Neighbour visit. Starting with only one charity last month had allowed me to gradually familiarise myself with the routine of social clubs and find a rhythm in my work week, so I now felt ready and excited to take on North London Cares as well. The North London Cares and South London Cares teams sent through the list of clubs in August that I could pull a random sample from, in the same way I had for South London Cares last month. This month I aimed to attend around 1-2 clubs a week for each charity.

Observation notes: Dancing together

During a regular Desert Island Discs club in south London, older and younger neighbours stand up and dance together to the neighbours' favourite songs to the chosen theme. One evening, three older neighbours stood up and danced and sang along to a reggae song that one of them had asked for. It was lovely to see how they moved around despite all of them supporting themselves on crutches.

When I went to my first North London Cares clubs, I was quite surprised that the charities are so similar and yet so different at the same time. The clubs have similar structures, social club activities and The Cares Family staff have the same welcoming and friendly approach – they always make sure everyone has a seat, that older and younger neighbours mix, and of course that everyone who wants one has a cup of tea. However, the way people engage with the clubs is different. Some older neighbours I have spoken to are mistaking North London Cares for the community centre where the social club they are

attending is run. For example, when asking how often they have been in contact with North London Cares, some neighbours wanted to include other activities they have attended in their community centre, which are not run by North London Cares. North London Cares often slots its social clubs into the existing programmes at community centres, meaning that many older neighbours hear about and attend social clubs arranged by North London Cares through spending time at their local community centre.

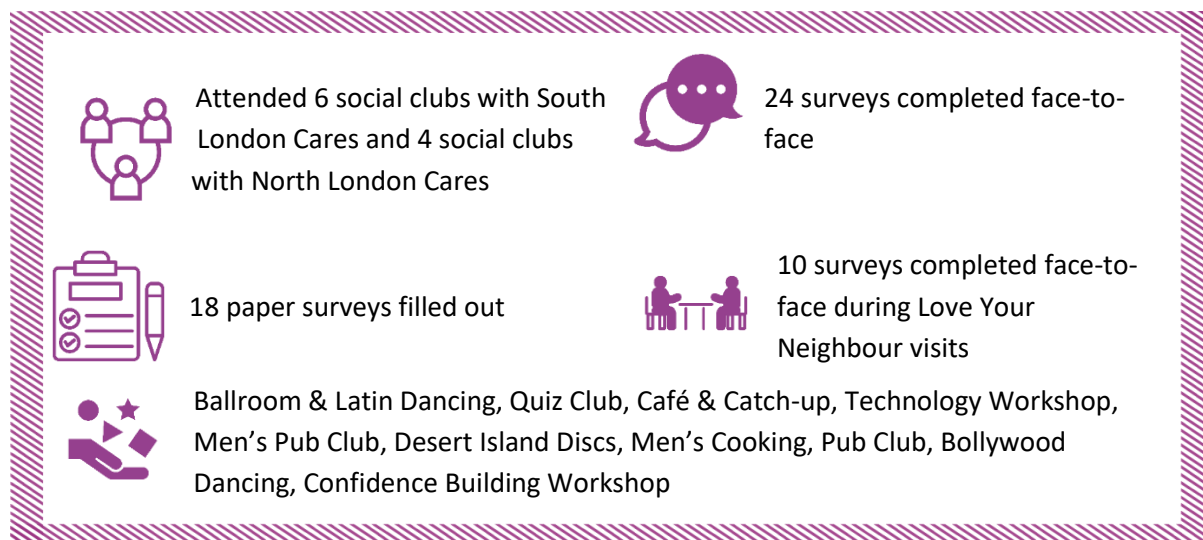
I have found that the face-to-face surveying method elicits far more detail, stories and anecdotes than I had ever anticipated. As such, they tend to take a format where I ask questions and the neighbour elaborates and I note down the answers. Through this process, I have discovered that the quantitative figure does not always match up with what the older neighbours have told me. For example, many neighbours have described feeling ‘uplifted’, ‘happy’ and ‘cheered up’ when coming to a social club. However, just after sharing these positive feelings, many neighbours have given a low score on their overall wellbeing. This low score was often attributed to housing issues, ill health or family issues for example. This made me reflect on the feeling of wellbeing – no matter how much fun you have in a social club, no matter how welcome and happy you feel in that very moment – external factors and the wider context of a person’s life seems to have the biggest effect on a person’s overall wellbeing.

Implications for the research

This month we started to see the differences between North London Cares and South London Cares, and realised we would need to be more adaptive in our approach than anticipated. Whilst The Cares Family model is the same across both North London Cares and South London Cares, location and context has shaped what these look like on the ground and the ways in which people engage. For our research this meant ensuring in north London that data we gathered was explicitly related to people’s engagement with The Cares Family, and also recognising this nuance in the ways they engage in our analysis.

Having now surveyed a relatively large number of people, we also found that the face-to-face method evoked many more nuanced stories than we had anticipated when developing this research approach, and that the embedded researcher was gathering a lot of qualitative data around the quantitative figures. As a result of this, we added additional comment boxes to the each of the survey questions to capture these comments alongside the numbers. We also considered these qualitative data when analysing the quantitative data. This would be something important to consider in the quantitative analysis, as often the additional comments did not match up with the quantitative data.

September



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- Attended 6 social clubs with South London Cares and 4 social clubs with North London Cares
- 24 surveys completed face-to-face
- 18 paper surveys filled out
- 10 surveys completed face-to-face during Love Your Neighbour visits
- Ballroom & Latin Dancing, Quiz Club, Café & Catch-up, Technology Workshop, Men's Pub Club, Desert Island Discs, Men's Cooking, Pub Club, Bollywood Dancing, Confidence Building Workshop

Reflections from the fieldwork

This month I continued attending social clubs at North London Cares and South London Cares. Until now I had been using a cluster sampling approach for determining which clubs I would attend in each charity; however due to staff changes at North London Cares I could not attend as many clubs as planned. It was felt by the North London Cares team that the new staff members would need some time to familiarise themselves with the context and the group before it would be appropriate for me to attend. I therefore had to take a step back and rethink my approach to sampling clubs to ensure it was still as robust as possible but yet in keeping with the approach and needs of the staff team.

This month I also started visiting older neighbours in their homes as part of the Love Your Neighbour programme. This has proven to be quite different to attending social clubs and I have had to change my approach slightly as this is even more personal and more sensitive – many of the older neighbours I have

Observation notes: Sharing a homemade cake

At Men's Cooking at The Abbey Community Centre older and younger neighbours prepare and share a meal together. In one of the sessions, one older neighbour had brought a homemade fruit cake to share with the others as it was his birthday – it was the first time he had baked that specific recipe in over 30 years. Everyone sang 'Happy Birthday' to him and the social club coordinator cut and handed out the pieces of the cake to the neighbours at the club.

visited are housebound and do not have that many visitors. For example, one neighbour could no longer walk down the stairs to her front door so instead she gave me the code to a safe outside her building where I could find the key to let myself in. Entering someone's house like that feels incredibly private and I am really grateful to all older neighbours for trusting me and welcoming me into their homes. The face-to-face surveys normally take between 10 and 45 minutes at social clubs. Some are really quick and some need more time to think and elaborate on the answers – and one neighbour even felt inclined to sing to me! I have been scheduling at least one hour for the Love Your Neighbour visits, yet I realised that this might not be enough. The older neighbours have

so many stories to tell and they have been very open with me – sharing stories that really encapsulate their identity and their history. They have shared stories about how they met their spouse, stories about how they moved to the UK and the struggles that came with that and stories about bereavement and ill health. An older neighbour opened up to me about missing physical intimacy after his wife passed away many years ago and feeling too old to attract someone new to share those moments with. Another neighbour shared his experience of feeling invisible when growing older, ‘when you’re over 90, no one will look at you again, no one has a real interest in you’. When people tell me these stories, I feel a strong need to stay in that space and be a listening ear, be human. Sometimes I struggle as it is hard to know when the research part of my work ends, and when me just being a compassionate human being starts. Because our conversations can sometimes cover quite emotive and sensitive topics, I find it is really important to always try and end the surveying session on a positive note, and sometimes that takes longer than I had anticipated.

Implications for the research

Once again, this month we had to be adaptive to the realities of evaluating a community-based programme and ensuring that our approach didn’t intervene with the ethos and approach of the organisation. Giving new staff members time to feel comfortable with a club and build rapport themselves with neighbours was important. However, for the research this meant adapting our sampling approach, removing certain clubs from the overall list to be sampled from, or being open to attending different numbers at different points in time.

As Amanda began to undertake the Love Your Neighbour visits, we became aware of how much longer these were going to take. Visiting someone’s home required more of an investment of time to put the individual at ease, build rapport, and also get through the questions. On a very practical level this required a rethink of timings and approach. We also had to put in place additional support and safeguarding processes for these visits, for example ensuring someone from The Cares Family team followed up with each person after a visit.

October



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-  Attended 4 social clubs with South London Cares and 6 social clubs with North London Cares
-  17 surveys completed face-to-face
-  25 paper surveys filled out
-  3 surveys completed face-to-face during Love Your Neighbour visits
-  Ballroom & Latin Dancing, Technology Workshop, Brunch Club, Desert Island Discs, London Symphony Orchestra Lunchtime Concert, Sign Language, Gizmos & Gadgets, Film Club, Halloween Party

Reflections from the fieldwork

This month I continued attending clubs in north and south London as well as visiting older neighbours in their homes. One thing I have been reflecting on this month is the way older and younger neighbours have been using the term ‘friends’ in different ways. When doing the face-to-face surveys at social clubs, many of the older neighbours said specifically that they would not call other people at social clubs their friends – they are acquaintances. ‘Friends’ seem to mainly be those people that you have known for a long time – for example who you grew up with, met while studying or at work. However, some older neighbours who take part in Love Your Neighbour included people that helped them with their shopping every week, or even me sometimes when answering to the questions on ‘What proportion of your friends...’ The younger neighbours I spoke to also used this term more freely.

At the very last social club I went to in south London it was difficult to do face-to-face surveying as the theme was Desert Island Discs, and so the music was loud, and neighbours were up and dancing. Instead I sat down next to a volunteer and asked him about why he had joined South London Cares. It was interesting to hear his reasoning around how he really wanted to do volunteering in his free time. He said he could not dedicate that much time, and therefore he searched around online and finally found South London Cares – the flexibility of the volunteering scheme made it attractive to him. I have been reflecting over the last months about the model and the way younger neighbours are moving around in the space and why they choose to join North London Cares and South London Cares.

Observation notes: Importance of staff

During the Desert Island Discs club in October, it was the Social Club Coordinator’s last day at South London Cares. The group was double the size than normal as so many people came specifically to say goodbye to him. I spoke to many older neighbours who were upset about him leaving, and they had made sure to come to the club to wish him good luck and in some cases hand over a gift. By the end of the club, almost everyone danced – the atmosphere was absolutely lovely! What an amazing evening.

Through my observations, I could see that younger neighbours are more active in their socialising and it looks like they are on a mission. This makes sense as they have all been through a volunteering induction where they are told about how the charities' work and what The Cares Family expect from them, whilst older neighbours just show up at the club. However, despite these differences both older and younger neighbours enjoy each other's company and feel relaxed and at ease in the social club space. For example, during the same Desert Island Discs club I watched one younger neighbour trying to keep him and the older neighbour cool with a fan after dancing – both laughed and were cracking jokes in the process.

Implications for the research

This last month we became aware of the different ways people are interpreting some of the questions in the survey. The value of using an embedded researcher has meant we have an insight into how people are responding to the questions and choosing their answers. This highlights the challenges and complexities of measuring subjective outcomes in a quantitative way. It will be important for us to consider this when analysing the quantitative data.

By this stage in the fieldwork, we had simultaneously begun surveying younger neighbours, or volunteers. In line with the symmetry of The Cares Family model, with activities set up to benefit both older and younger neighbours alike, we had used a symmetrical survey asking the same questions and seeking to measure the same outcomes. Observations from Amanda though suggested that the experiences were not entirely symmetrical and younger neighbours were gaining different things from being a part of The Cares Family. We added in additional comment boxes to the online survey, similar to how Amanda had been recording additional comments with older neighbours. We hoped this would help us to have additional detail on some of their answers to add more context around the quantitative figures.

November

	Attended 15 social clubs with North London Cares		22 surveys completed face-to-face
	16 paper surveys filled out		4 surveys completed face-to-face during Love Your Neighbour visits
	Diwali Celebration, Pub Club, Yoga, Coffee & Craft, Renaisi Workplace Visit, Film Clubs, Spoken Word Poetry Workshop, Sign Language, Men's Cooking, Tea Tasting & Origami, Winter Wellbeing Event		

Reflections from the fieldwork

By the end of this month it is time for me to say goodbye to North London Cares as well. There have been so many highlights and I feel very grateful for all these moments I have shared with neighbours and staff across north and south London.

Observation notes: Supporting each other

One older neighbour had been absent from North London Cares for over six months due to illness. She described feeling very grateful that she was well enough to come back to the clubs again as the charity had become like family after her husband passed away some years back. It was lovely to hear her talk about how supported she felt by the North London Cares team that had called her regularly to check-in on her while she was away. After our chat, a group of older neighbours came up to give her a hug and said they had been worried and missed her at the clubs.

By now, it is getting harder to find older neighbours I have not yet surveyed so instead I have spent more time having informal chats with both older and younger neighbours. Now at the end of the fieldwork period, I feel that the line between being a researcher and just a regular neighbour coming to many clubs is rather blurred. Many neighbours have mistaken me for working for The Cares Family or being one of the many volunteers. This is understandable as I have served lots of tea, helped to put on fake eye lashes for the Halloween Party and tried to learn some dance moves at the Bollywood Dance club. For five whole months I have seen one of the older neighbours almost every week as he is part of both North London Cares and South London

Cares. He always gives me a hug, asks how my work is going and how I am enjoying the club. Being this embedded has come with its difficulties but also so many great insights into how South London Cares and North London Cares work and the people they work with.

Implications for the research

This last month of data collection was partly a very practical one, with time spent working with The Cares Family staff to get additional data for us to match with our survey data. This month also involved a final push to get as many surveys completed as possible, calling people up who had expressed an interest in taking part but hadn't had time, for example.

However, this month was also an emotional one and showed both the strengths and challenges of using an embedded researcher in a community-based setting. Through Amanda's role she had become embedded in The Cares Family activities, particularly at social clubs – becoming a regular feature and in her nature often lending a hand. Whilst this was important for building trust and rapport which was vital for reaching the number of people this research did, it was also important that Amanda's neutrality and 'researcher hat' were at the core. This was something which we reflected on throughout the fieldwork period, and finding the right balance was difficult. In order to compensate for this, Amanda's fieldwork diaries were analysed by another member of the research team, to add a critical eye to the observation notes and reflections.

Conclusions



These reflections from the embedded researcher and the wider research team taught us a number of things about The Cares Family model and their outcomes, and about challenges with impact measurement more broadly. For more about these findings please see our full final report. Through gathering our reflections on this process, we also learnt a number of things about taking an embedded researcher and ethnographic approach to impact measurement:

1. Taking this approach is **resource and time intensive, but it's important to take that time to genuinely build connections**. As reflected through this diary, undertaking face-to-face surveys took a lot of time from the researcher to sit and have conversations with people. Allowing those conversations to take as long as they needed to was important in building rapport and eliciting open and genuine responses, rather than quicker but less thoughtful ones.
2. When evaluating community-based services, it is important **maintain the ethos and approach of the organisation being evaluated**, so that research does not undermine the work which you are seeking to understand. This meant ensuring that questions were appropriate for the setting, and that research only took place when it was considered appropriate – and would not be disrupting the welcoming and comfortable environment.
3. Working in an embedded way to evaluate a programme means **finding a balance between becoming a part of the organisation you're seeking to evaluate, whilst also maintaining a neutral and objective viewpoint** as much as possible. Providing a space for reflections with the wider research time, and considering this in the approach to analysis, helped to maintain this balance.