A recipe for success?

Identifying social and community impacts in the
work of community cafés:
The case of REFUSE pay as you feel café

Introduction to the report

In this report we document the development of a method to enable a community café to identify and evidence the social and community impacts that its work has generated. The report is divided into two distinct parts. In the first part of the report we explain the method, and offer a toolkit as to how this approach could be reproduced and used by this café and other community cafés to evidence their social impacts. In the second part, we document the findings of the research project and the social and community impacts of the RE^{E}USE Community Interest Company (CIC) café in the town of Chester-le-Street located in north east England.

The RE^{E}USE café uses food collected from food retailers and manufacturers that would otherwise be wasted. RE^{E}USE CIC forms part of the Real Junk Food Project network of cafés and activists. The café is run by volunteers on a 'pay-as-you-feel' basis. This means that café-users can pay whatever sum they choose for the food they consume. This payment can also be in-kind and involve the giving of time and skills towards the running of the café, rather than a monetary payment. The toolkit outlined in the first part of the report is intended for use by any community café regardless of its motivation or form of organisation.

The research reported here was undertaken as a co-production project between Newcastle University and RE^{E}USE CIC. This means that the research was produced together. The research project that developed and which is documented here responded to a need by the café to identify and evidence the social and community change that the organisation envisaged may occur in the months immediately following the café's opening. People who participated in the research were involved in shaping the narrative of the report.
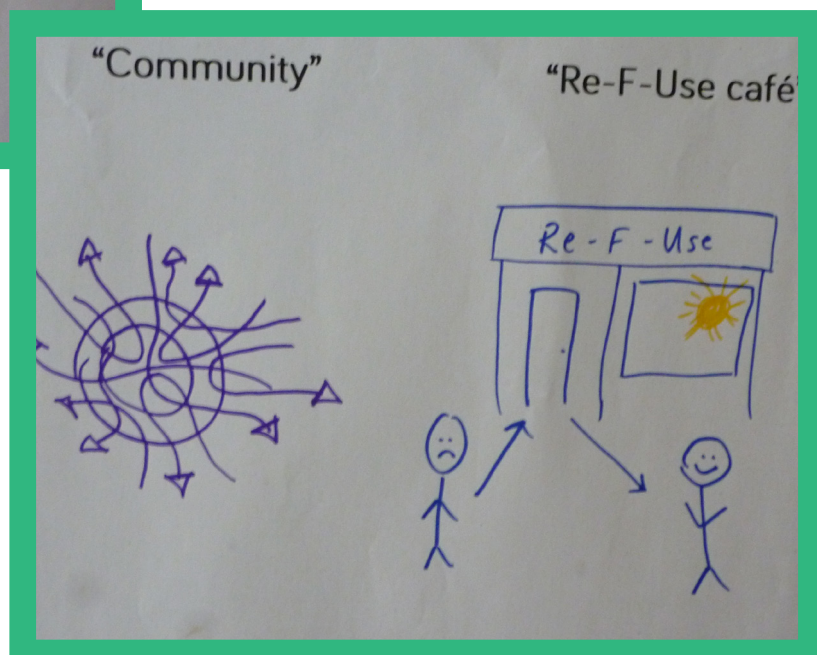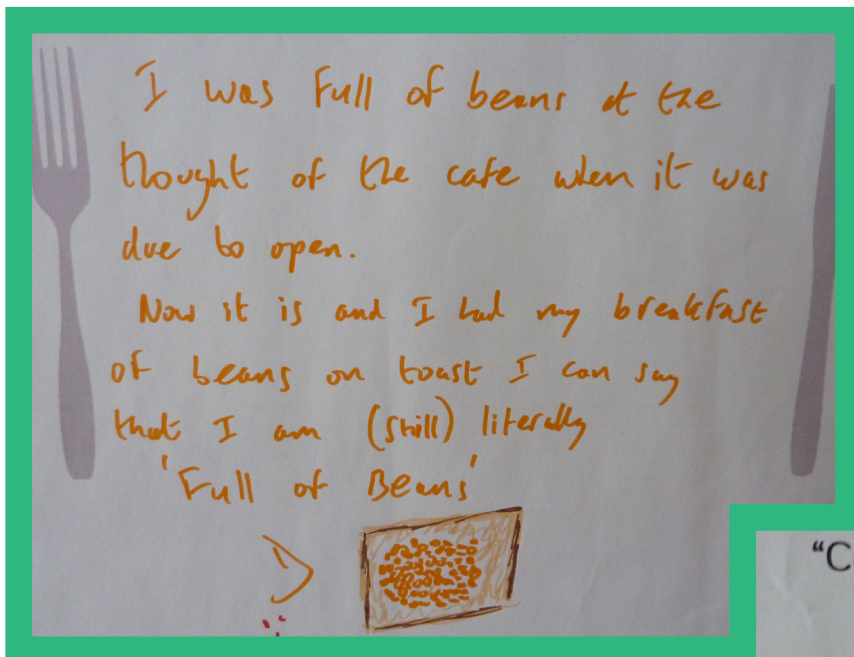
Source of the title page image: J Midgley, 2018

Method description and process - what we did

In this part of the report we explain the approach used in the research. The toolkit presented can be reproduced and used by this café and other community cafés to evidence their social impacts.

The toolkit is in part an adaptation of an existing participatory action research (PAR) approach. Research which uses a PAR approach involves working with people and generally has the aim of achieving social change, and can involve a variety of different methods to collect data and discuss this. The method that we adapted is called 'photovoice'[1] .Photovoice is usually used with pre-existing small groups of people to collectively value experiences that may otherwise remain hidden and identify things and issues that people feel strongly about. These can be both positive assets and characteristics that they value or negative ones which they would like to see change. Issues and experiences are identified by the use of photographs that are taken by group members and discussed together, sometimes in response to an agreed issue and/or sometimes as a prompt. The output from this process is often a collective narrative report evidenced by photographs and their associated explanations. Alternatively it may take the form of a collection of different people's perspectives to explore an issue in greater depth. These findings may in turn be used to catalyse future action.

The research commenced just after the café had opened. This meant we were uncertain as to how people knew each other. So we started off from perhaps a more difficult position – the only thing people had in common was that for some reason they had a connection to the café. This connection could have been fleeting and one-off or they may visit and eat and/or volunteer at the café regularly. However, this also was an advantage in that we did not come with any idea of a pre-determined or pre-identified group.

This meant that we had to recruit a 'group' of people willing to participate in the research, and in turn adapt the 'photo voice' method in a number of ways. This was achieved by an open process whereby we left 'open invitations' to participate alongside placemats on the café tables (see figure 1). These prompted anonymous responses to the idea of the 'RE[F]USE café' and 'community' and provided the contact details of the lead researcher if people were interested in taking part in the larger research project. (Even if you are familiar with your café and established groups this can still be useful to do to encourage voluntary participation and gain a quick overview of people's impressions). While we had a huge response to the placemats, few people came forward for the next stage of research without the researchers or café link researcher having an informal chat with people who they either saw completing a placemat or who they recognised as people returning to the café. Approaching people in this way allowed us to provide information sheets on what further participation entailed, explain the research in more detail and answer any questions.

A series of one-to-one sessions took place with participants. The first allowed participants to provide their informed consent to take part in the project, and collect and familiarise themselves with the instant camera and film that we provided and begin to engage with the project in more detail as we encouraged them to think about what images they may take (for example, the value of a still life to express an idea, as well as the need to ask permission to take pictures of other people). A maximum of three further one-to-one meetings allowed participants to discuss their photographs and select those which they were happy for us to reproduce. A further reflection session was held where the camera was returned. Finally we held a group workshop to allow participants to comment on our analysis and help direct the narrative of the report.

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1   Sitter, K.C. (2017) Taking a closer look at Photovoice as a Participatory Action Research method, Journal of Progressive Human Services 28, 36-48.
Sutton-Brown, C.A. (2014) Photovoice: A methodological guide, Photography and Culture 7, 169-185.
Wang, C. and Burris, M.A. (1997) Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment, Health Education and Behaviour 24, 369-387.
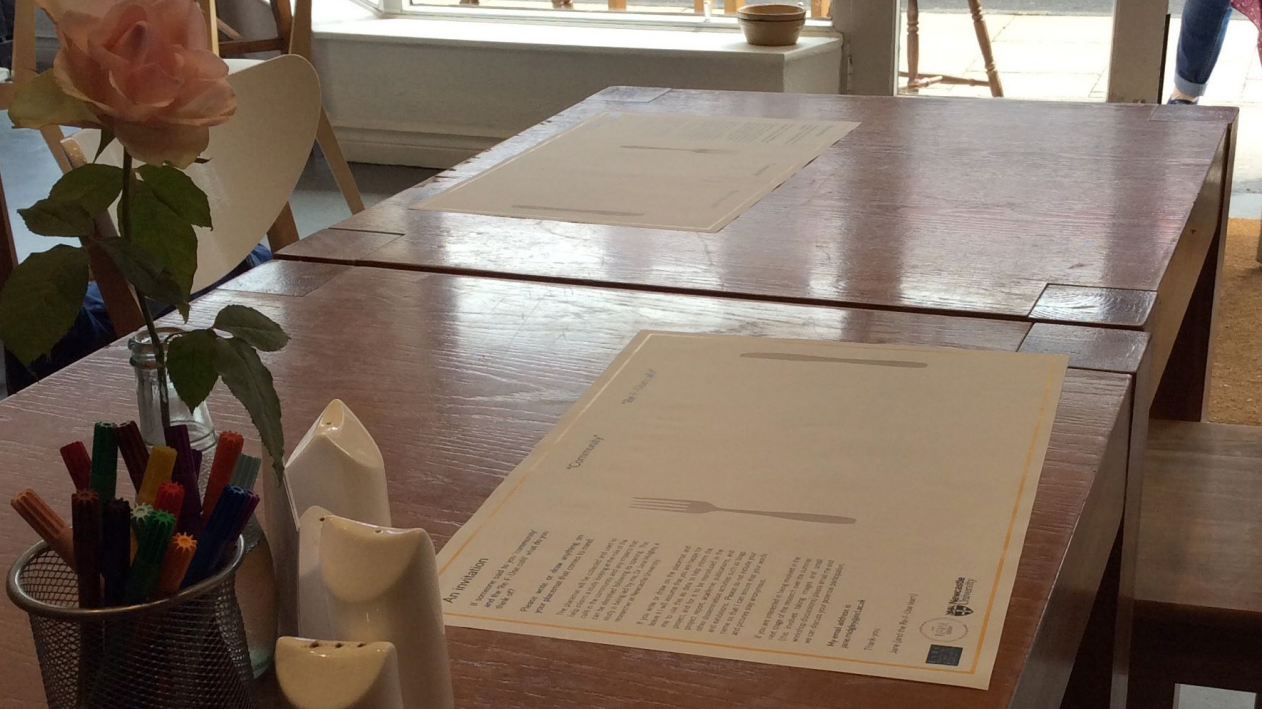
Six individuals took part in the research. Two participated in four interview sessions; one participated in three; one participated in two; and one participated in one session. Another individual participated in one session and then withdrew from the project. Only data from the five individuals who wished to remain part of the research project has informed the report and are reproduced in part two. Given the depth of data that can be collected using this method and its resourcing a small number of participants would be expected.

Things to think about

1. Your Aims

What do you want to identify? Why is this important?

This may be a starting point, to which you can return at a later date and repeat the data collection and analysis to identify if a planned impact has been achieved. Alternatively, it can be retrospective and reflect to what extent a desired change has been achieved. Or, it may be transformative and identify an opportunity for future change.

In our study we aimed to identify social and community impacts of the café in the six months immediately following its opening. The impacts were identified in two ways. First, the analysis of the placemats provided a benchmark or starting point to identify wider community thoughts and experiences. Secondly, the photovoice conversations provided more detail about the social and community impacts of the café individually and at the end collectively, and how this may have changed over the months following the café's opening.

With whom do you want to share this information?

A clear purpose enables the research to be easily explained to other people, such as potential participants or attendees at dissemination events, other community groups, funders and/or policymakers. It also helps the research to maintain focus.

2. Identify 'who' you want to be involved and how you can encourage their participation.

It is essential that people are informed of what being involved in the research may entail. This includes details on the activities and time commitment involved, what you are going to do with the information (data) that they provide, and that their participation is voluntary.

This is why we chose to begin with requests for anonymous contributions in response to two questions that were left on A3 paper placemats for café visitors to complete voluntarily. We left placemats sporadically around the café for three weeks. Placemats on tables were accompanied by a tub of coloured felt-tip pens for people to respond to the prompts as they wished. A3 worked as a size that provided plenty of space for drawings and writing. They were also designed to mimic a more formal place setting and attract people's attention while sitting and talking or waiting for their order to be served. Placemats were chosen in discussion with the café so that this facilitated the cleaning of tables and could be easily collected and replaced when a table was cleared.

It was also envisaged that some of the content and themes identified from the placemats could be used as a starting point for workshop discussions or as prompts for participants if at any time they found choosing subjects for the photographs difficult. However, as participants preferred not to work in a workshop format and did not generally have problems identifying what to take pictures of, these two further functions for the placemats were not needed.

To encourage participation with the research individual meetings with participants were undertaken to enable those who wanted to be involved in the project to contribute as much as they could over the projects lifetime. This raises the importance of projects building in flexibility to allow them to adapt to changing circumstances as necessary. These may include people's availability, but also participants withdrawing from the project due to illness or other commitments. Moreover, at the start of the project it became apparent that people were more comfortable in one-to-one meetings, whereas by the end of the photovoice data collection people were curious to find out about the other images and findings and so this change facilitated the possibility of the final workshop.

3. Time

Any research involves a time commitment for participants. We adapted the advised six group sessions because this seemed to be off-putting and we found that people could not readily commit to this because they did not already meet regularly together. We therefore broke the meetings down into one-to-ones arranged to fit with participants lives and the usual times that they would visit or volunteer in the café. This demonstrates how the use of photovoice can require a significant time commitment from the researcher(s), both in meeting participants and in transcribing and analysing the photo-led interview discussions outlined below.

4. Skills and resources

It is important to identify the resources and skills needed to complete the research from the outset and plan for these requirements accordingly. In our project several instant cameras and appropriate self-developing film was purchased for use by participants. These cameras were selected due to their instant printing feature and their ease of use by a range of age groups and abilities, their robustness as well as price. It was important to ensure that participants had a good understanding of the use of the camera at the first meeting. The cameras were chosen because they had no ability to save digital images and we relied entirely on the instant printing feature. The instant printing feature encouraged an awareness of the process of taking a photograph and also made other people aware that a photograph being taken, which in turn facilitated conversations and permission for images to be captured as well as an ability to quickly see what had been taken. Participants were given a camera to use at their convenience and return at the end of the project, but one participant preferred for the researcher to keep the camera and collect it from her and take pictures during their visit to the café and meet with the researcher during this time. Film was replenished as necessary, each film pack provided 10 images and so participants were asked to bring a minimum of 3 images for discussion at each meeting.

Researchers met with participants on a one-to-one basis and were experienced in completing interviews. It is important to put participants at ease and make them feel as comfortable as possible during discussions. We followed a more conversational style of interview aided by greater familiarity when meeting with participants over time, as well as general conversations in the café when people were not being interviewed. Interviewers can encourage participants by making clear that there are no right or wrong answers, just as there were no good or bad photographs, and that the project is simply interested in their perspective as everyone brings different but valid

experiences, insights and knowledges. Participants can find the opportunity to take photographs and talk about what is important to them in their daily life and community creating a positive experience. Interviewers should endeavour to guide the discussion without trying to elicit particular responses from participants. All the interview discussions were led by the photographs that had been taken, at times even those that had not been taken and just thought about. Interviews focused on when and why the image had been taken to identify the importance of the experience, issue or idea for the participant.

All interviews were digitally audio-recorded. Digital audio-recorders are widely available with prices typically reflecting the quality of the recording. The interview recordings in this study were transcribed into a verbatim text by an outside contractor. Transcription is a time consuming process. A rule of thumb is that it can take around four times the length of a recording to complete its transcription. For example, a 15 minute interview can take an hour to transcribe. It is important that transcription is accurate. However, some discretion as to what is transcribed can be used if participants discuss topics outside of the focus of the research at length.

Analysis of transcripts can be a challenging process to complete at first. Thematic analysis involves considering each sentence or paragraph of a transcript and labelling all or part of it with a term which describes the idea the participant was trying to communicate. This process is known as "coding" and the label is known as a "code". Once all transcripts have been coded in this way, the researcher will look for patterns, similarities and differences between codes. Some codes may be grouped together into categories and these can then be built up into themes. The themes are the overarching ideas which have been identified in the research from the data provided by participants. During the analysis, we also kept a note of which photograph was linked to which interview text. A draft report detailing the emergent themes was then discussed with participants at a group workshop. The final themes identified and agreed are discussed in Part 2.

5. Ethics

All researchers have a duty to ensure that the research process or its outputs do not cause harm to participants or other people and take appropriate measures to reduce or negate any foreseeable risks and problems. Consequently, these elements need to be thought about in all stages of the research project. All participants who were involved in the photovoice element of the study were provided with an information sheet. This provided details about the research and the potential involvement of the individual. It can be helpful to organise information sheets in the form of frequently asked questions, such as:

- what is the study about? (describe your aims)
- what would my participation entail? (what the participant would be doing and how much time they would need to give)
- how will my data be managed? (confidentiality, anonymity)
- how will my data be stored and for how long? (password protected and secure computer hard drive)
- how will my data be used? (such as published reports, presentations)
- who should I contact if I have questions about the research? (provide name and contact details such as a work phone number and/or email address)

Prospective participants were also provided with a consent form to give their informed consent (see Appendix 1 for an example consent form that can be amended to fit your project). Individuals who have decided to participate in the project, completed and signed this form after they have had the opportunity to ask any questions to demonstrate that they have read the information sheet, understand the project and the nature of their involvement and are happy to be involved but that they can also stop their participation at any point and withdraw from the project.

Many participants will not have been involved in research in the past and may find this an unfamiliar experience. Some individuals may find it strange to discuss the photographs they have taken and explain the reasoning behind it, especially while being audio recorded. The physical handling of the photograph, ordering them and sharing them helped participants to share and tell the 'story' of what they had taken and why. To reduce any possible

discomfort throughout the research we asked only for people to talk about things that they were willing to share with others or did not mind others overhearing, as all interviews were completed in the café during its normal opening hours. This awareness and further reflection was also encouraged by the final selection of images at the end of each meeting whereby participants chose which images they would be willing to make public. This selection was indicated by a sticking a small sticker onto the photograph which were then collected by the research team and the physicality of handing over a photograph also reiterated the handing over of the image control. At no time did we discuss the personal details or share the detailed discussion with other participants. The quotes that we have selected from the transcripts have been reproduced with confidentiality in mind. It was only at the end of the project, once the data had been analysed and a draft report produced for discussion did participants come together with an awareness that their involvement would be clearly known to others. Anonymity was discussed with participants at the start of the project, and people were given the opportunity to choose if they wished their name to be acknowledged in the report, which was revisited again in the final workshop. For projects where the aim is to give a voice to the community or café users for example, there is a careful balance to be struck between this aim and the appropriate level of anonymity and confidentiality protections.

Projects should ensure that all identifying details are removed from transcripts and reports. Participants should be given a pseudonym or code in the write up of research, to prevent them from being identified. All data collected from participants should take place in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

Step 1	Introduce the research project to your communities of interest (who do you want to involve in your research, your participants and your target audiences)
Step 2	Recruit your participants – it may be necessary to raise awareness and engagement to do this. Choose an activity appropriate to your groups (we invited open anonymous comments and drawings on placemats left in the café).
Step 3	Arrange a first meeting with each participant and complete informed consent (ensure that each participant is familiar with what their involvement will be, and what you will do with the data they provide, and reassure that they can stop and/or withdraw at any point). Ensure that each participant is comfortable using the camera, loading film and taking photographs.
Step 4	Arrange another meeting that allows time for them to take photographs for the first interview discussion, audio record the meeting and collect the selected photographs. Repeat a further 2 times/ as frequently as is viable for both parties.
Step 5	Arrange a final feedback meeting and collect the camera.
Step 6	Transcribe the audio-recordings. This can be done at the same time as you collect the data.
Step 7	Analysis. Read the transcripts and look for themes across the data.
Step 8	Prepare a draft text where quote and images expand and explain the themes and points you have identified (and may be used to suggest future action points) and arrange and conduct a workshop to discuss and finalise the content of the report with your co-researchers and participants (if they are willing to do this).
Step 9	Publish and disseminate your findings and make the necessary plans for any next steps, such as action to be taken. Repeat and update the study.

This part of the report is organised into four themed sections that document the social and community impacts and changes that we were able to identify from the different data collected and finalised in our workshop. These reflect how and why the café was viewed as an asset within the community.

In summary we identified the following themes, which capture the impacts that the café is having:

1. What makes us unique?
2. We're more than a cafe
3. Social life
4. Changing habits

These themes are now expanded upon in more detail, using images and quotes from the data collected by café-users and our participants[2] to explain and evidence our findings.

Theme 1: What Makes us Unique?

Participants identified one of the primary impacts of the café as being the creation of an environment which had a unique offer within the local community. The cafe was able to fulfil needs which were not currently being met by other commercial establishments in the town. There were several distinguishing aspects identified by café-users.

Participants commented on how the philosophy of the café set it apart from other establishments:

"I love the idea of this one…The idea of food that would otherwise have been thrown away…It's all about recycling these days, not just the plastic but the food." (Mark)

"I think [a different] café is all for making money. This place wants to make money, don't get me wrong, but it's for the people…" (Deborah)

One participant commented on how the café challenged people with its expectations of the users:

"…when they go to cafes, that's what they expect, [crockery] to get cleared up. Here, it's a different kettle of fish. Yes. It's supposed to be for everybody to [muck] in and have a go with everything." (Participant 1)

The philosophy of the café and its reliance on donated food items led to operational practices such as changing menus which created anticipation and excitement among some participants which was unmatched elsewhere:

"…you walk in the [local pub] on any day of the week and you know what you're going to be eating…Unlike the cafe here where you never know what's going to be on…it's just the thrill of finding out what's going to be on the menu." (Mark)

One café-user drew attention to the relationship between the philosophy of the establishment and the décor, commenting on a large chalk board stating "food is not free" (illustrated figure 2):

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2 The terms café-user and participant were chosen and agreed by photovoice participants, as well as their level of anonymity and any pseudonym used.

"Is it a mission statement? I'm not sure if it is. Is it an uplifting slogan, is it reminding us of the purpose of the place? I mean, you wouldn't normally get that in a café. You might get a leaflet telling you about the ethos of the place, but I don't know if you would get a big A1... So, I think that is part of what makes the place unique."

(Oliver)

Figure 2: Food is not free statement on the wall. Source: J Midgley, 2018

At times this philosophy that engaged with ideas of value and reciprocity also prompted participants to question how the café's various offers were valued by others and interpreted in a way that differed from their own, with concerns for how this reflected on the café more broadly.

"So, I was a bit disappointed because that's not right, the fact that she came in here and had a three course meal and put 80 pence in..." (Mark)

"Well I think there should be something. I don't think anybody should come in and just walk out. I don't think so, no, I don't think that's right." (Participant 1)

"...somebody ... will say, "Oh, those two lads that have come in, they'll just literally fill their carrier bags full of stuff out of the fridge and just walk out." So, it gives it a bad name, I think... because this place is so relaxed and people are coming and going and that. Them behind the till, they're not here to monitor what people are doing, I suppose. Which is a good thing but then again, it's always open to abuse which is a shame because it's spoiling it for everybody else... Well, they could be taking away food from somebody who genuinely needs it." (Mark)

"I think people should help out. Don't just come in and use it just for their benefit, it's for everybody, isn't it? [I] didn't like [people] leaving the dishes, no [...] Well it takes all kinds, I suppose, to make a world." (Participant 1)

There was a sense from participants that the café was run in a way which was more accepting of different people and behaviours, especially relating to children and the dedicated play space:

"Like, children crying, I've been in places where that's frowned upon but at the end of the day, it's a child and they can't help crying. In here, behind that column, there's some music on and some people sing and dance but they wouldn't do it in [in another café] ... And there's toys all over there and [the staff here] don't care; that's what children do, make a mess." (Deborah)

Several café-users commented on how it was the 'people that made it' and often noted how café staff and volunteers were friendlier than in other establishments, with one participant commenting on how another café's employees were "quite false" (Deborah). Participants connected this to the philosophy and operational style of the café:

"Well, it just shows how different this café is. As I say, if you were just in a café across the street, and you're in by yourself, then you're just a customer but when you come in here, people are more than a customer, it's more friendly." (Mark)

"I like the idea of not having paid staff, just volunteers. So, they want to be here and they give up their time to be here. That's better than someone who's, "I've got to go to work today but I don't really want to go. Ah, Monday again."...I just think they must want to be here because they're all happy." (Deborah)

The physical space of the café such as its table arrangement, decoration and the presence of a piano marked out the café as being a different space to other cafés and spaces in the town. This was an important element in encouraging people to initially enter the café and to continue visiting. This was discussed by one participant and illustrated by figure 3:

"...I was struck by the interesting tables and chairs and angular space ... it's kind of informal. I like that compared with a formal dining room. You know, with white table cloths, and so I like the informality of it." (Oliver)

"So there we are the Jacobson chair and the antique chair in contrast... I am very conscious of the aesthetic choices of the tables and chairs. And the pictures on the wall, of course, whatever, anything about the interior. That's a big factor for me. It would probably put me off if I looked into a place and didn't like the furniture. I would judge it. I seem to think, "They've got good furniture," so they're probably good with food as well. "

(Oliver)

Figure 3: Distinctive space. Source: Oliver, 2018

"[I]t was a disaster [...] down the road. It was cram jammed with people, they wouldn't give their seats up and it was a nightmare. ...but that's what it's like there. Here it's more relaxed and open and spacious." *(Deborah)*

Another participant commented on how the café had good accessibility both at the entrance and the toilets.

The café's philosophy, staff and volunteers, and physical characteristics combined to create a distinctive atmosphere:

"It's just the atmosphere, it's welcoming and makes me smile...The staff, the layout, just the feel to it, it has a nice, warm feel [...] Because we get the regulars at the table and we get chatting, get to know people [...] It's like a little family [...] Positive." *(Participant 2)*

"Well, I feel more comfortable coming in here than I do going into an ordinary café. Even though I can walk into a pub and have a meal but I don't think I would feel the same going into an ordinary café, unless I was with somebody else. In here, I feel like I can just come in and sit down and have a meal and there's no stigma attached to it or anything..." *(Mark)*

One participant explained how this contrasted with their regular environment and commented on how the café had become a sort of haven:

"...where I live is rather rough at the moment [...] and it's just nice to escape. It gives some normality." *(Participant 2)*

"I think the [other café], it's very snobby...whereas this is just the people's people, really. It's quite refreshing to see people not in designer clothes and outfits." *(Deborah)*

The atmosphere of the café was identified as being calm and peaceful, welcoming and accepting.

"It's all peaceful, because they're just carrying on like normal." *(Participant 1)*

"I think it's [the] community bit and I think it's a lovely relaxed, when my partner came in she said how nice [it] was [...] compared to like a pub atmosphere." *(Mark)*

"It's calm for her, and it's nice, positive place...calm, it's a very big and open space, spacious for her." *(Deborah)*

Theme 2: We're more than a Cafe

In this theme we identified how the café enabled people to care for themselves directly and/or for family and friends without stigma, such as an ability to address food insecurity and social isolation. And in so doing build on, and also create, a sense of community awareness, support and a feeling of responsibility for each other.

The care of self and children is evidenced by one parent who documents an evening in the local park when discussing the image shown in figure 4:

"After I'd been in here on a night-time I was in a good mood, so I took the baby out for a walk and caught the skyline … [it] was beautiful and […] I put it onto the night mode and tried to take a decent picture. And that came out and I thought, "Well…" I was just in a lovely mood because I'd obviously been fed, I don't know, I just thought, like, it gave me an olive branch, sort of thing, another chance… Then [I] went for a walk in the park with the bairn, yeah."
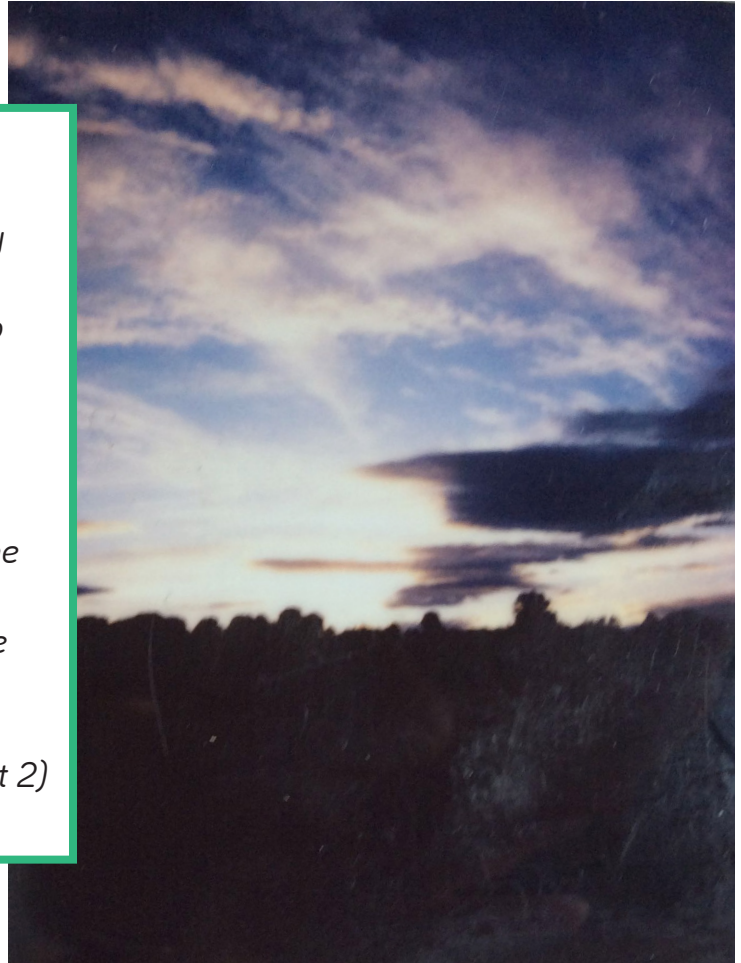
(Participant 2)

Figure 4:: Evening in the park.
Source: Participant 2, 2018

Whereas another participant highlighted the sense of being part of an extended community by visiting the café:

"Yes, an extension of it [community] I suppose in a sense that this place might be considered a bit like a club, I don't know, where you walk in, everybody says, 'Hi,' everybody knows you and I mean I suppose that might happen if you went every day to another café. This is the one I prefer to go to." (Oliver)

One further component of this was the 'pay-as-you-feel' basis of the café. By simply choosing how much is paid for the cake or meal provided prompted an awareness of both what food was worth and how the cost prevented others accessing food in other shops and cafes. This is illustrated in Figure 5:

Figure 5: Deciding what to pay. Source: Oliver, 2018.

"[A friend] was wanting to make his pay-as-you-feel sum amount appropriate and correct, something which would keep the place going, but he didn't know how much it should be. He was saying, "Should we check out other menus and base it on that, or is there some other criteria?" […] I think he was working on the basis that he would rather and would even be happy to pay too much if it meant the place survived."

(Oliver)

The ability to interpret 'pay-as-you-feel' by each café user enabled people to acknowledge the support and value of the food in their own way. For example, some café-users' cleared tables of used crockery and cutlery whereas others despite having a limited budget valued the opportunity to be able to pay what they could afford and make a contribution to the café in this more usual way. Moreover, if people made the choice to visit the café and valued the food and conviviality offered by the space, then seeing others value the café's activities reinforced and helped them value their decisions to trust in the café to support themselves.

Whilst other sections have mentioned the willingness of people to support the café and people in the wider community through the opportunity provided by the 'pay-as-you-feel' ethos and volunteering opportunities. In discussing the image of scallions (shown in figure 6) that the participant had donated to the café from an allotment the conversation highlighted the opportunity for mutual reciprocity but also the strength of the appreciation shown towards the café which allows for more diverse philanthropic expression in the local community.

"So I brought them in one day, like a week yesterday, today rather, and the chap told us that they were used on a garnish on a salad. Just liberally, because they're quite strong. I thought it was nice to know that some of the food that I have brought in has helped in the café …They were spare, yeah, because they had quite a few. But I gave some to my neighbours and that, as well…And I thought, "Well, the café would appreciate them."

(Mark)

Figure 6: Scallions. Source: Mark, 2018

One important element of this community awareness and care was the community fridge. People used this both for themselves, their families and for their neighbours. This was discussed by a participant in connection to the image in figure 7:

Figure 7: Packed lunch. Source: Mark, 2018

"Well, it was a brunch sort of thing, and it was the bread that I got from here, and the salad that I got yesterday at lunchtime, because I took a takeaway container. So, I made my own sandwich up, and that saved me from having to buy something."

(Mark)

The ethos that this resource was available to everyone and prevented food waste as part of the café's activities alleviated concerns about the stigma of using the fridge in this context. The fridge raises awareness of others in community and the accessibility and affordability of food.

Again discussing the photograph of the community fridge in figure 8, one participant explained how the community fridge captured the opportunity for choice and dignity in people's food provisioning practices:

"Well it was how much was donated [...] which is good [...] Because it's more for people to choose if they want to choose, come in and choose what they need or what they want."

(Participant 1)

Figure 8: Community Fridge. Source Participant 1, 2018

Whereas another participant commented on how they balance their personal use of the fridge with a regard and responsibility for other people in the community:

"I feel a bit embarrassed about taking stuff from [the fridge]. I feel as if I might be depriving somebody else of it. If I think to myself I could go and buy that in the supermarket maybe somebody else couldn't so maybe I should leave it for them but that's not the right attitude. I think what I should do is just reflect it in the donation and take it. That's what I'm going to do today...there's more than one of a particular item so that makes it easier...just in case someone else asks later in the day and would be in desperate need of it."
(Oliver)

It was also acknowledged by some people that the café complements a small set of organisations providing free community meals in the town, embedding a greater sense of community in the local area.

Theme 3: Social Life

The café was also perceived to have a significant impact on social relations. There are two aspects to this.

With increasing familiarity with the café some users have become 'regulars', with favourite tables and preferred times to visit. Some users are beginning to build connections with new acquaintances made in the café, even if this is just a mutual hello or acknowledgement when they recognise each other.

> *"If I do eat at home, it would be like a ready meal from Tesco or something like that. So, I find that this now, not just meal wise, social wise is good because I'm meeting different friends." (Mark)*

> *"It's the social side of it. I mean it's, I mean you know, building up acquaintances." (Oliver)*

In conjunction with the additional 'bistro' and event evenings this is leading to new connections between diverse social groups and providing opportunities for people to enjoy new experiences. This was discussed in relation to the Iftar meal shown in figure 9:

> *"Did you get a picture from the Iftar, a meal, with the Syrians? That's a hugely unique feature of this place. I think you'd have to go a long way to find an Iftar meal which two dozen Syrian refugees attend."*
>
> *(Oliver)*

Figure 9: Iftar Meal. Source: RE^{E}USE, 2018

> *"So I was out from 7:00pm until 10:30pm and it was bring your own wine. I was in the company of new friends, someone I'd never met before, someone that I know and his friend. So we were striking up the beginnings of conversations which will continue in the future, laying down the foundations of future…that's a lasting benefit. If you go to a restaurant on your own you have to take your iPad or something to work on. Or if you go out with friends but you don't usually share a table with people you haven't met before and begin to make new friends." (Oliver)*

Whereas another participant commented: "I'm proud to be part of this café, it's like an extended family, it's really nice" (Participant 2). This participant then refers to the friendships her child has made with another. They emphasise the importance of children from different 'walks of life' encountering each other and playing together, something the café has helped them to achieve as a family visiting, eating and socialising with others beyond their immediate home neighbourhood.

The café is also becoming space where people invite friends and family to meet, as well as a meeting place for groups such as book groups and friendship groups.

"We have got into the habit of having a lunch afterwards, so I persuaded everyone to come here. Not that it took much persuading [...] I explained it to people, and they were very interested to discover it, because there are still people who don't know about it." (Oliver)

The café has become a place that residents from a local care home look forward to visiting. They may be accompanied by care professionals or their relatives and friends. Over time familiarity with the café may bring them to the café without concerns about their safety or acceptance.

Due to the wide range of people who used the café, a noticeboard on the wall was identified by one participant as a fruitful way of making connections:

Figure 10: Visit to the café. Source: Deborah, 2018

"Yes and how the community, as a whole, come into the place. So, from that noticeboard there, I've got a lady coming in [to the care home] to do messy play, for dementia. So, I check the notice board, every week, for snippets." (Deborah)

Theme 4: Changing Habits

People reflected on the impact of the café on their everyday practices. Examples we were given included: eating a greater variety of food; eating healthier dishes and enjoying meals through the changing menu; and enabling people to get out and eat in a different space. One participant explained how the social connections at the café meant that their approach to eating out had changed, discussed when talking about the meals enjoyed in the café illustrated in Figure 11.

> *"…this is the first time I've come so frequently to a café" and continuing later "I only started to eat out regularly when the café came along." (Oliver)*

> *"…that seemed to be the biggest impact on what I was up to. Generally speaking, I wouldn't have been out in the evenings to the open mic or the restaurant evenings. I tend not to eat out in the evening and I did it only because it was an interesting new venture. I mean, there are restaurants in Chester-le-Street and I could eat out in the evening, but I wouldn't be coming out for seven o'clock and being here until 9:30pm or 10:00pm." (Oliver)*
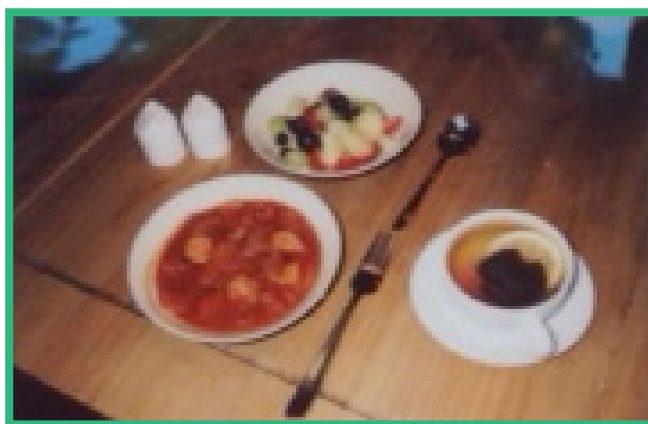

Figure 11: Café lunch. Source: Oliver, 2018

Another commented on how they had previously eaten at the pub several days a week but that since the café had opened they only been in once for a social drink. This meant that the type of food they consumed when eating out had changed and they commented on the positive experience of the variety of dishes on offer:

> *"I don't cook at home [...] and [the pub] is where I used to have a lot of my meals [...] So, I think that's the reason why I like coming in here as well, because you can get a lovely meal too [...] A healthy meal [...] Better than these prepacked [...] You know, there's nothing wrong with them I suppose, but when it's all fresh and ingredients and that [...] it's just the thrill of finding out what's going to be on the menu." (Mark)*

Participants often commented on the "normality" of the café environment, and one in particular valued this as it offered a source of hope for a different future to enable her to bring up her child:

> *"[The café is] Just a different environment, yeah… Because where I live is rather rough at the moment with drugs, and everything… I don't want [my child] to go off the wrong path. I just want to bring him up properly." (Participant 2)*

People also noted how they were made more aware of different issues (food waste and food poverty) and had become 'advocates' for the café and its use of food that would otherwise become waste. This included outrage at retailers not doing enough to stop food going to waste, as one participant commented

> *"[E]verywhere should be aware now that there's no such thing as throwing food away." (Mark)*

To both participants suggesting people try the café and the food which also led to some participants, informed

by their experience, directly challenging others perceptions of the café and the food offered.

Some participants also spoke of how their practices changed within the café space itself. Patrons adapted to what they originally considered unusual and uncomfortable behaviours which were normalised within the café space. For example, discussing the example of the community fridge, a participant commented:

"The first time I came in, I saw people walking to the fridge and I thought, "Well, what are they doing there?" And then they explained what it was because I felt a bit … not intimidated but reluctant to go and look in because I thought, "Oh." Because when you go to the half-price section in Marks & Spencer, when you go and you get something, you don't just put in straight in your bag, you've got to go to the till so I felt a little bit guilty. Even though I knew I was going to be paying; by just putting stuff straight in my bag, it was a strange experience because you're missing out the till. You're getting the stuff first, putting it in your bag and then it was up to you, how much you put in there…It was alien…So, after the first few times of coming in, I feel more relaxed about going to the fridge but it was strange, at first." (Mark)

Summary

While food waste reduction was the central motivation in the development of the café, this study has sought to identify its wider social and community impacts. We have shown how the café created a unique environment because of its philosophy, acceptance of different people, the staff and volunteers and the physical space. These features combined to create a distinctive atmosphere. The café also enabled people to care for themselves directly and/or for family and friends without stigma, allowing them to address food insecurity and social isolation. This built upon, and also created, a sense of community awareness, support and a feeling of responsibility for each other. In addition, connections were built as a result of the café, which provided opportunities for people to enjoy new experiences in a new meeting place. Finally, the café also impacted on everyday habits, including: eating a greater variety of food; eating healthier dishes and enjoying meals through the changing menu; and enabling people to get out and eat in a different space.

"This research was deliberately done over the first couple of months of opening our cafe. We are really pleased that it captures some of the heart of what we are trying to do and be in Chester-le-Street. Since this report, I can think of numerous other stories relayed to me from volunteers and cafe users that match the themes and emphasise the findings of this research. The cafe is going from strength to strength, with a broad cross-section of the Chester-le-Street community using the space: from vegans to single mums, from homeless people to working professionals. We look forward to potentially repeating these research methods in six months to a year's time, seeing how things have progressed", Nikki Dravers, co-director of RE^{E}USE.

Appendix 1: Generic Project Consent Form

This is for guidance only and for use with individuals who can provide their informed consent to participating in your research. This should be amended to reflect how you wish to take forward your project.

[TITLE OF PROJECT]

Consent form for participants

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the information sheet (dated XX) [sent to me by email].	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐
4.	I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in [workshops (a series of group discussions with other participants and the research team)/interviews] in the café and that my comments may be heard by other people and so I need to be think about what information I want other people to know about me when I share information and discuss images.	☐
5.	I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in a series of [workshops/interviews] that will be audio recorded and that some of my words may be reproduced in future publications and dissemination activities such as blogs and exhibitions relating to the research.	☐
[6.]	[I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in a series of workshops and in these workshops notes will be taken. I will be able to decide what images are made available for future publication, if any, at the end of each session.]	☐
7.	I understand that in providing selected images for discussion in the [workshops/interviews] I agree that these images can be reproduced by the research team in the report and future publications and dissemination activities such as blogs and exhibitions.	☐
8.	I understand I can withdraw without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn, and that any data (images or words) I have provided will not be used. If I decide to withdraw I must notify XX [by XX/in the last workshop/interview].	☐
9.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained to me (e.g. pseudonyms, efforts to anonymise my contribution that the researcher will take and what efforts I can take, etc.), subject to any legal and safeguarding concerns.	☐
10.	The use of my contribution to the research project's analysis process, final report and other possible publications and dissemination activities such as blogs or exhibitions has been explained to me.	☐
11.	Please delete to reflect your consent: (i) I wish my participation to remain anonymous. Or, (ii) I wish my participation to be recognised by including my name.	

Participant:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Acknowledgments

About RE^EUSE

RE^EUSE is based in Chester-le-Street: in April 2018 we launched a creative and inclusive 'Pay As You Feel' community cafe on the high street. We also run pop-up restaurant events, campaigns, a schools project and a grocery box scheme in County Durham. We are raising awareness and education about the environmental impact of food waste, building community and providing healthy food and good company to anyone that wants it.

We operate on a 'Pay As You Feel' basis: guests can pay for their meals in cash, but non-monetary donations of time or skills are just as valuable. We believe PAYF encourages us to think about the true value of food: the resources, time and energy that has gone into producing it, but also includes and empowers those who may struggle to afford food.

The core staff of RE^EUSE are Nikki Dravers (Director), Mim Skinner (Director), Susie Hart (HR Manager) and Jonny Forster (Surplus Food Co-ordinator).

Contacts

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