Working with experts by experience during the pandemic

Blackburn with Darwen Food Poverty Alliance, final report, May 2021

Collecting and displaying food landscape related stories

Food poverty is an intricate subject filled with varying opinions and nuance. While statistics are helpful on a population level, peoples individual experiences and stories are more valuable in understanding the drivers and solutions. Often collecting, understanding and re-telling the stories whilst keeping the detail as well as variety is difficult; a single toolkit isn't flexible enough to understand the myriad of complexities. Using online software, Miro, our partners, ImaginationLancaster at Lancaster University, designed a series of 'conversation starter' tools which were varied enough for project participants to choose what was important to them, then areas for further discussion were identified from conversation around this initial tool with additional tools designed as needed.

> " *We've co-designed some really flexible tools that we see working in this project and beyond to gather and connect peoples lived experiences. The tools can be adapted in real time to speak to the interests and experiences of each participant.*

Roger, ImaginationLancaster
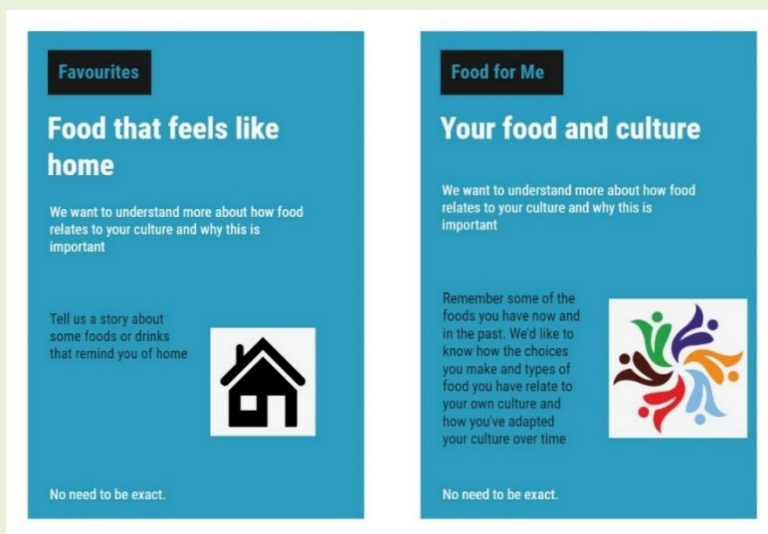
The key difference between these tools and an 'off the shelf' tool was that they were completely editable and customisable: they could be adapted to meet the exact needs and direction of the story each person wanted to tell. This allowed us to individualise the tool to use a specific person's own words to draw out their story. For example, these tools both ask about food and culture: one was based on language used in the individual's initial discussion, a feeling of 'home' associated with food; the other focussing on food they discovered when they moved to the UK and how they had added some British food culture into their own Arab food culture.

The tools were also able to be adapted to suit small group discussion with people who may or may not have lived experience and for organisations and businesses. Each person, group or organisation had stories which contributed to the discussion around food landscapes but the customisable tools allowed each the flexibility to tell their story in their own context.

Through using the tools, a web of linked stories emerged. Participants used typed text, photos, screenshots and voice recordings to tell their stories, but there was the potential to use video, drawings etc to add the detail in whatever way everyone prefers. The key to all the tools and following conversations is that they are led, and in part, designed by the participants.

Our challenges and learning

Obviously COVID and its restrictions have been a challenge as gaining young people's trust and having detailed discussions over video call is difficult and waiting to meet up in person concentrated much of the work into a short time. The online Miro software has its challenges in that functionality is limited with a free account and it doesn't work well on mobile phones or tablets. Our main learning came from realising the impact of being able to adapt the tools used to facilitate discussion to reflect each person's language or snippets of conversation. Reflecting back someone's specific use of words helps develop rapport and using the tool to focus on small 'off hand' comments enabled us to tackle specific aspects.

> " **The tools gave me a guide to work from, they helped me focus on what was important to me.**
> Sarah, young person and refugee

Our next steps

We will collaborate with ImaginationLancaster to present our work in a meaningful way to key stakeholders and the alliance allowing them to see both the bigger picture of all aspects discussed with participants as well as honing in on individual stories or comments. We hope to make the tools available to a wider audience via the online Miro software enabling them to continue to be adapted based on the needs to the next user.

Our key achievements and impact

- Worked specifically with ethnic minority groups and individuals to add their voice to the existing body of work done in Blackburn and Darwen
- Developed a series of customisable tools to start conversations about food poverty and food landscapes and used them to capture individuals' stories and experiences in their own words
- Tools can be adapted in real time to fit any subject, not just food poverty
- Tools will be made openly available online for continued use

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www.foodpower.org.uk

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