



Locked in a Room

(Sophie Turnbull, Thinking Futures 2019)

[Themes]

Community Connections
Novel Engagement
Building Trust

Spending time locked in a room with a community group is an unusual, but rewarding introduction to each other



[Aim & Approach] Dr Sophie Turnbull explores digital health technology, behavioural change, and health inequalities. This can be a difficult area to work with the public in a meaningful and equitable way. This event explored a novel way to build a trusting relationship between a community health organisation and researcher.

[Practical Details] This event took place in November 2019. It cost around £500, including activity fees and travel for the community group. It was funded through [Thinking Futures](#), Bristol University's contribution to the [ESRC's Festival of Social Science](#).

[Key Partnerships] [Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group](#) (HHEAG, now called 'Heart of BS13'), a community group in Bristol led by and for residents, supporting local people to improve their health, well-being and enhance quality of life in the area.

[Activity & Outcomes] Sophie and 12 members of the Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group took part in a 90-minute-long 'Escape Room' challenge, working together to solve a series of tests, puzzles and clues to break free, before spending time discussing sensitive health issues. Reflecting on the benefit the format had over more traditional workshops, Sophie said: *"It really broke down the hierarchical boundaries that can be present when undertaking engagement activities. By the time we got round to the science bit, I felt the group trusted us and were comfortable talking about some challenging experiences."* For the group, the experience was also a way to reward people who had been working hard for the community and may rarely or never visit Bristol Harbourside. Having everything arranged made it easy for them and the organiser commented: *"Thank you so much for taking the time to think through meaningful participation and how that would work for the community we serve"*.

[Support] Community organisations can be wary of 'The University' as a remote or elitist institution. They may feel 'used' by academic researchers who see them as a single-issue demographic, perhaps only contacted because they live in an area of multiple deprivation. To develop a good quality, lasting relationship built on trust and mutual understanding, the PE team carefully considered different approaches and arranged an activity that allowed the researcher and participants to get to know each other on an equitable basis first.

[Impacts] The event has led to an ongoing connection between Sophie and HHEAG which allows her to get essential feedback for her [research](#). Sophie reflected: *"Personally I got so much from the day - I felt like I learnt lots about the group's experiences and challenges. It feels like we could really create something that could build on the great community work that is going on, in addition to supporting people to be more active."*

Public Engagement

Strengthening research with conversations that count

