



Walk and Talk

(Alice Willatt, Thinking Futures 2019)

[Themes]

Community Connections
Lasting Relationships
Improving Research

A walk in the woods builds mutual trust, provides research insights, and leads to a successful funding application

[Aim & Approach] Dr Alice Willatt's research focuses on community development organisations that respond to social crises like underinvestment in the urban fringes of cities and rising rates of hunger. She uses participatory approaches to explore how organisations develop place-based, community-led approaches to local economic development. Collaborating with community partners to co-design inquiries and building relationships with local people is crucial to this research method.



[Practical Details] This event took place in November 2019. It cost around £1000 and was funded through [Thinking Futures](#), Bristol University's contribution to the [ESRC's Festival of Social Science](#).

[Key Partnerships] [Matson, Robinswood and White City Community Partnership](#) are a local community group funded by the [Gloucestershire Gateway Trust](#) (GGT), charity partners of award-winning Gloucester Services on the M5 motorway

[Activity & Outcomes] Alice worked with Matson, Robinswood and White City Community Partnership in Gloucester to explore the relationship between GGT (a pioneering social investment trust) and the community. The festival provided impetus to organise an event, and a very well attended woodland walk for local residents took place around Halloween. Participants talked about how businesses can enrich their local communities and the role of social investment trusts. It allowed Alice to build a relationship with members of the Community Partnership and form a mutual understanding of how each partner would benefit from working together. Together with the Community Partnership she has gone on to win funding to develop this research further, something that would not have been possible without the initial successful event to create a positive rapport.

[Support] Using our experience of brokering equitable relationships, the Public Engagement team helped shape the event, to ensure it was a genuine collaboration. This approach helped community participants to recognise that university researchers are willing to listen to non-academic views. For all involved, it highlighted the importance of feeding a range of views and perspectives into activities and partnerships.

[Impacts] Alice says *"The shared feedback and stories, alongside the relationships I built in the planning of the event, led to a successful [Brigstow Seed Corn fund](#) bid and a [follow-on project](#). This [research explores the role of Robinswood Hill](#) for local communities to understand how the GGT can encourage further engagement and increase community wellbeing. The event is also informing the wider development of the research project, which I plan to put forward for an ESRC New Investigators grant."*

Public Engagement

Strengthening research with conversations that count

