

## **Brains at the Bevy**

### **Innovation and creativity**

*Brains at the Bevy* is the inspiration of a community owned pub and University of Brighton's Community University Partnership Programme. Opened in December 2014 The Bevy is the first community owned pub in the UK on a housing estate. Funded by 700 shareholders, re-built by volunteers, it is now a major community hub in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

*Brains* brings learning to the community, rather than the community to the learning, in short talks from local academics. It aims to support adult learning, research impact and widening participation in Higher Education via an innovative, easy to sustain model.

Monthly talks have covered:

- 'No to Modern Football'
- NHS privatisation and local democracy
- 'The Joy of Sex', teaching children about positive sexual expression
- BREXIT
- Organ donation, how to address the shortage
- Retail, a whirlwind tour of change.

Talks are free and last for an hour, with ample time for discussion. We acknowledge that there are many brains in the room, coming from different perspectives, and that this is part of the learning resource. There is a commitment to using language that is accessible. The University's Widening Participation Team is on hand to advise on routes into HE.

### **Sustainability**

*Brains* has already proved its sustainability. Deliberately set up as a low cost model with mutual benefit at its heart, researcher time is provided pro bono and this is justified in the University by the public engagement and research impact benefits. The pub's modest room hire and promotional costs need to be met but we had funder commitment for a second series before the first series was finished. We now have more researchers volunteering than we need for the second series so the community will be asked to vote on their favourite 6 topics.

### **Impact**

Events attract around 20-30 people from the community and university and are followed by informal discussions in the pub, as people stay on to explore the issue in greater depth. The audience size is ideal since it enables discussion and interaction between the academics and community.

Participants were asked to complete a short evaluation form with likes and dislikes of the session and we received 68 completed forms. The response was overwhelmingly positive:

*Informal, comfortably intimate. Accessible venue. Speaker presented some material to get our discussion going, without overbearance - just right. After the discussion people were able to linger, eat drink and continue the discussion or not. Great model.*

*Absolutely great. Communities need more events like this to connect people together. Well presented, well publicised. Glad I made it.*

*Speaker was incredibly knowledgeable and engaging. She pitched the whole talk perfectly. A thoroughly wonderful evening. More of the same please*

An evaluation meeting with the Bevy staff noted:

- How engaged the audiences were
- The talks changed people's thinking
- The research presentations were plain language yet substantial, providing a great platform for measured debate
- New custom for a community owned business
- The direct support of the University for this emergent community enterprise

The group of academics who delivered the talks were uniformly positive and wanted to see a repeat, considering that it met the objective to support public interaction with their research.

Overall we can identify the following impacts:

- Thoroughly well received as evidenced by participant and partner evaluation
- The research, the collective 'brains' present, the format and the venue contribute to a low cost, exciting innovation in adult learning
- An innovative route for conversations about accessing HE has been opened up
- Research impact by providing an opportunity for academics to enable their research to be presented to a diverse audience, and for it to be enhanced by feedback
- Hosting these talks in a community owned enterprise brings in valuable new business
- It has helped to improve relationships in an area where 'studentification' is becoming a problem
- The funders<sup>1</sup> have expressed how pleased they are with the project and wish to see it continue.

### **Transferability**

We are delighted that this has been such a success and our evaluation has indicated that *Brains* could be replicated with:

- A university committed to community engagement, research impact and widening participation
- A community owned pub close by - there are now 70 community owned pubs in the UK

When in York in April we intend to visit the Golden Ball, York's co-op pub, for a discussion about whether *Brains* might work for them.

**Dave Wolff and Juliet Millican (Brighton) and Warren Carter (Chair, Bevy Pub)**

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<sup>1</sup> The National Network of Collaborative Outreach gave 3k which included the development time for the project. Running it again will cost half or less.