**Evaluation Exchange**

The Evaluation Exchange is an exciting new project that grew from collaboration between UCL’s Public Engagement Unit and Aston-Mansfield’s Community Involvement Unit. The Exchange model is currently being piloted with 6 teams made up of 23 researchers from UCL and 6 voluntary and community sector groups from Newham. The teams are being supported to work together on an evaluation task such as gathering or analysing data or designing an evaluation strategy. The aims are to build capacity for evaluation practice in the voluntary sector and enable researchers to engage with communities and voluntary sector organisations.

The Evaluation Exchange pilot has been funded by UCL’s Innovation and Enterprise’s Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund. The ethos of the Evaluation Exchange is connection, collaboration and experimentation – working together, trying new things and seeing what grows from them.

We’re excited about what we’ve achieved so far. The pilot has given researchers an opportunity to enhance their skills outside of a formal university setting and make connections with communities in east London. For the organisations, this project has laid the groundwork to create real and lasting change in relation to their approach to evaluation. This should help them prove the value of their work to funders and external stakeholders.

On March 22, we held our Evaluation Exchange event where we celebrated the wonderful work UCL researchers and voluntary organisations have done over the past six months.

The event enabled members of the voluntary organisations and their research partners to show attendees their evaluation process; the methods or tools used and the advantages to using such methods. It was evident that many of the organisations felt that in previous years they only evaluated their data through numerical methods i.e measuring how many people attended their sessions over a certain period. However, through working with UCL researchers, the voluntary organisations were able to find out how they can evaluate the impact their work has on their recipients.

Through hearing from the different researchers, we also discovered the many innovative ways that we can gain information, and that not all data has to be gathered through a generic questionnaire. For example, researchers that were working with IROKO theatre company used what they called a ‘IROKO Tree of Discovery’. Participants were asked to hang different coloured leaves (red, amber and green) onto the tree to signal their satisfaction levels. This was a fantastic, visual way to collate data. Other researchers used both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding.

Labour councillor, Rachel Tripp also attended the event who said, ‘through seeing the work in the voluntary sector, I have seen the power of a civil society’. Her words illustrate how important it is to continue supporting vulnerable people in our society. Ultimately, the event highlighted how vital and beneficial collaborative work is.