

CAMERADOS

LEARNING REPORT

AUGUST 2022



For: Lankelly Chase Foundation / Esme Fairbairn Foundation / The Tudor Trust / National Lottery Community Fund.
compiled by the Association of Camerados
Camerados CIC Reg: 09866041

A QUICK WORD TO BEGIN WITH...



IF THIS TWO MINUTE FILM DOES NOT APPEAR ABOVE **PLEASE CLICK HERE :**

-

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/KD95DXK SX5Q](https://youtu.be/kD95DXkSX5Q)

THINGS WE'RE GOING TO COVER

01

What is Camerados?
The movement and the Association

05

New Learning approach and
Some key things we learnt

09

Our Kind of Governance
Staff, board, council
and Profiteroles

02

Some Numbers, Some Words
and an Impact statement

06

Camerdos in Primary Schools

10

Conclusion and the Future

03

Sphere of influence of
camerados

07

The Covid Years - re-invention
and relentless iteration

04

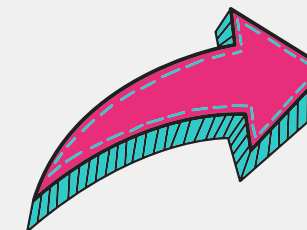
The Story so far 2015 - present
(recap for the absent minded!)

08

Street Activism & Art Activism



Probably best to get yourself some
tea & biscuits before proceeding.
We wanted this to be short and pithy
but too much has been happening!
Hope we hold your interest!



CAMERADOS IS...

...a social movement of people who get through tough times by looking out for each other

...using a set of **6 principles** to be a bit more human and creating places in neighbourhoods - called **public living rooms**.



A **camerado** is halfway between a stranger and a friend

Camerados' public living rooms (PLRs) are no agenda spaces in all sorts of places - parks, libraries, hospitals, schools, pavements.

Here is a selection of some camerados' public living rooms...





Milton Keynes Market



Barnstaple, North Devon



Forrest, Australia



Staywell CIC, Derby



Port Downie Canal, Falkirk



Marple, Stockport



Saffron Walden, Essex



Broomfield Market, Colorado



Off grid, Boro



Ikeston, Derbyshire



Barry, Wales



Farmerados, Somerset



Cityfest, Wolverhampton



Hackney, East London



Acombe, York



Freetown, Sierra Leone



Malmesbury, Wiltshire



Gatis, Wolverhampton



Farmers Market, Shoreham



Cardiff Hospital



Wolverhampton



Warneford, Oxford



Shirehampton Library, Bristol



Dover Technical College



Baileys Cafe, Brooklyn



Bowley, Rochdale



Glasgow, Scotland



Auckland, New Zealand



Ripley, Surrey



Grays Shopping Centre, Essex



Boscombe, Bournemouth



York College



Portadown, Northern Ireland



Spotland, Rochdale



Geek Retreat, Stoke



Norwich Council



Taupo, New Zealand



Monkeypark, Chesterfield



Queen Elizabeth School



Wishbech, Cambridge



THE MOVEMENT AND THE ASSOCIATION

All camerados in public living rooms are giving their time for free not dissimilar to a knitting group or a book group. Unconstituted, they are a loose affiliation of people who agree with the camerados' principles and want to look out for one another. Non professionals sitting alongside each other without agenda is hardly new but somehow it's forgotten so we've just give it a cool badge and a name.

The only constituted organisation is the **ASSOCIATION OF CAMERADOS (AOC)**. This is the small staff team based in Oxfordshire which does 3 things - inspire, resource and connect people to become camerados and run public living rooms. Their strategy is simple: **A public living room in every neighbourhood.**

We also want people to join the movement and be a camerado in their day even if they never set up or visit a public living room, but with such a small team and a global ambition this strategy makes sense and we hope the badge wearers happen along the way.

The AOC is a not-for-profit community interest company (CIC) and it is this small body which receives funding. **Click here and prepare to be amazed (!!)**
See all the public living rooms...



[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/2CAVJHXW](https://tinyurl.com/2CAVJHXW)



SOME NUMBERS IF THAT'S YOUR THING

86 UK based public living rooms open as of July 2022
55 Regular 31 pop-ups*

36 more public living rooms in development

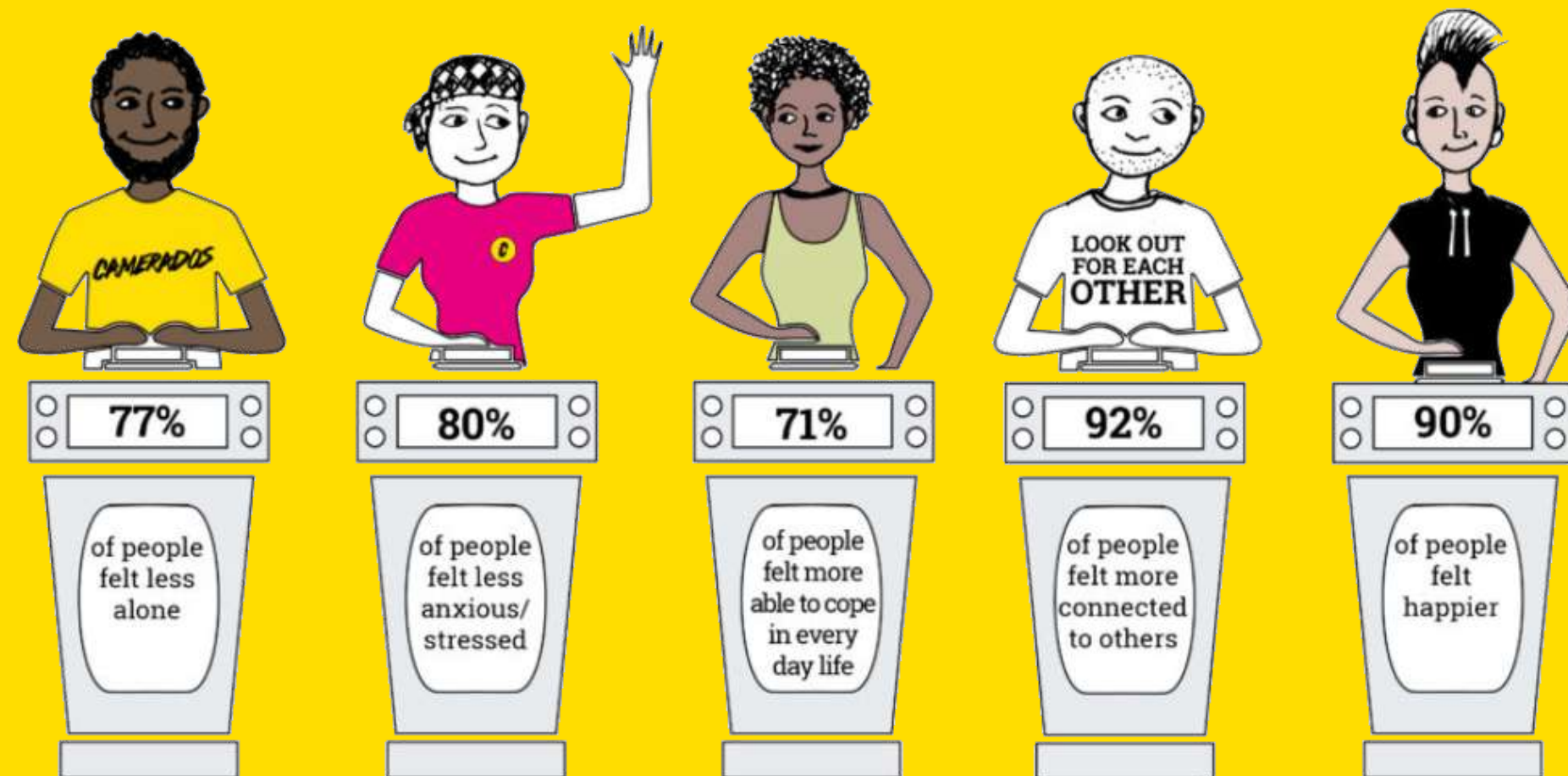
2,153 people per week on average attend public living rooms

770 hours per week that Camerados public living rooms are open

70% of pre-COVID Public living rooms permanently closed showing impact of pandemic on movement

*PLRs also exist in USA, New Zealand & Sierra Leone

Sheffield Hallam University report on the impact on people using Camerados' public living rooms



WORDS

From people attending public living rooms as gathered by People's voice media. We have tons of videos & recordings of voices in the movement but we don't want to tie you up for hours so here's a very brief selection of comments.

"I feel very socially isolated with being unwell for most of my life. That's really meant that I spend a lot of time on my own. It's wonderful to go to Camerados and see people, and chat and be sociable".

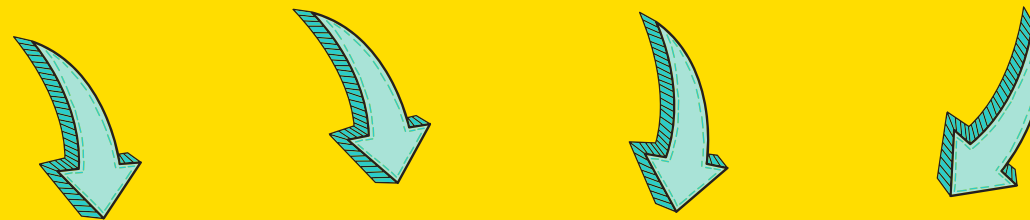


It looks like we're just sitting on our arses and doing Jack shit but we're doing something with no agenda. We're looking out for each other. It's a big thing - you can't see it from a distance can you but it's there.

"It didn't work for us because we weren't sure how to do it correctly"

"Helping people discover their own answer to their own problems is a powerful thing... people have to find their own path don't they?".

It's the most profound way to engage people that I've experienced in 30 years of community development work



LOADS more stories from camerados folk here: <https://tinyurl.com/mvt6jk74>



WORDS

“People would never meet otherwise, the group has brought people together from different backgrounds”



“What I get from Camerados is very much that human space, the feelings that you can change the conversation and you can change that institutional approach to things..It’s not about fixing, it’s okay to fail”

“It felt like he was so used to people being categorised that he couldn’t comprehend a space for everyone”



“I was sat on my own in the café having my birthday lunch alone until this lot said come and join us in the public living room.”-



“I’m a carer, I’ve been supporting my husband with dementia throughout lockdown and so I know just how essential this is for people. Even though it may seem simple, it makes a big difference.”

“Camerados saved my life”



For **latest full Insight report** please click here

<https://tinyurl.com/5b6dcvve>



TELL US YOUR PUBLIC LIVING ROOM STORY

(REMEMBER TO TICK THE BOX AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS CARD IF YOU'RE HAPPY FOR US TO SHARE YOUR STORY)

Today was my first time visiting a public living room. I felt very welcomed and supported. I felt safe also. I found it a comfortable space to be me and to chat.

The people here are not judgemental and they listen.

Thank you for accepting me
as me. 😊

IMPACT STATEMENT

by Dr Martha Newson (University of Oxford / University of Kent)

- a cognitive anthropologist, specialising in group identities and belonging



In no uncertain terms camerados (members of the movement) have reported that the movement impacts them at the highest levels, ultimately, in members' own words, 'saving their lives'. That Camerados has evidenced this level of support and connection within the six months I have worked with them, sets an incredibly high precedent.

The paths to impact within the movement are many and varied, including positive impacts on members' thoughts and feelings in their everyday lives and interactions (i.e. via an understanding of, and acting on, the movement's principles).

Impact at a community level is demonstrated with a growth of 86 public living rooms opening, which also gives a sense of the scaling up of individual-level impacts that the movement has done considerable work to explore and evidence.

Societally and politically, Maff and other members of the movement are engaged in public speaking around the country and we're seeing the movement's principles cited in key publications as well as used on the ground in health care, social work, community development and elsewhere.



SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

We're making impact
in the way we
influence the external
world

- **Front line health services adopting approach since 2020**
 - 2 care homes in Derbyshire.
 - 1 care home in Croydon, if this goes well then they want to push out to all their sites.
 - 1 new hospital in Cardiff.
 - Also examples of folk working in social subscribing or supported living using PLRs as a way for folk they support to get together with their community - Devizes, Trowbridge, Malmesbury, Swanick, Hove, Milton Keynes, Stockport allotments.
- **Educational settings adopting approach since 2020**
 - Children's Parliament in Scotland championed us and rolled out to primary schools through their "Unfearty" programme.
 - Pilot in 7 primary schools programme in England. Rotherham school - very multi-cultural, serious poverty challenges - adopted it with real gusto and are great leaders in our movement.
 - Strathclyde University, Brunel University, York FE college all opening PLRs
 - World's busiest PLR is Bristol Univ Student Union - 700 students a day
- Legal & General, SAGE and other **global corporates** have repeatedly sought our insight with tough times in their workforce especially due to isolation caused from the pandemic and home working.



- Throughout pandemic **social workers across UK** embraced Camerados including asking us to provide closing keynote at first national social work conference by newly formed Social work England. Chief Social Worker is a big supporter.
- **Keir Starmer's team** invited us to a policy meeting on their future direction on community power.
- Subject of **Radio Four** programme "Digital human"
- **BBC Children in Need** - CEO & Senior team asked us to spend day with them. Now asking us to do the same for their managers.
- After Maff's blog "Why we dread Mental health week" went viral and was widely read **Samaritans** approached us to feed into their future strategy
- Camerados are a founding member of **Cost of Living Alliance** and also early supporters of Operation Wi-Fi (which campaigned for and secured the first National Databank giving increased access to Wi-Fi during pandemic).
- **Cormac Russell and John Mcknight's** new book cites camerados work



Very conscious this is inevitably informed by those we HAVE influenced because they tell us but...

- Despite **6 NHS hospitals running PLRs** (with 130,000 people using them) it still hasn't taken off in this sector perhaps due to COVID and very entrenched fears around infection control (even pre-pandemic)
- Out of 7 **primary schools** only one really sustained involvement. Yes the pandemic hit them hard but perhaps education struggles with "no fixing" and "being a bit rubbish sometimes"?
- **Corporates** hire us to speak at events but none have taken up the challenge to bring PLRs into the workplace or work with us long term

THE STORY SO FAR...

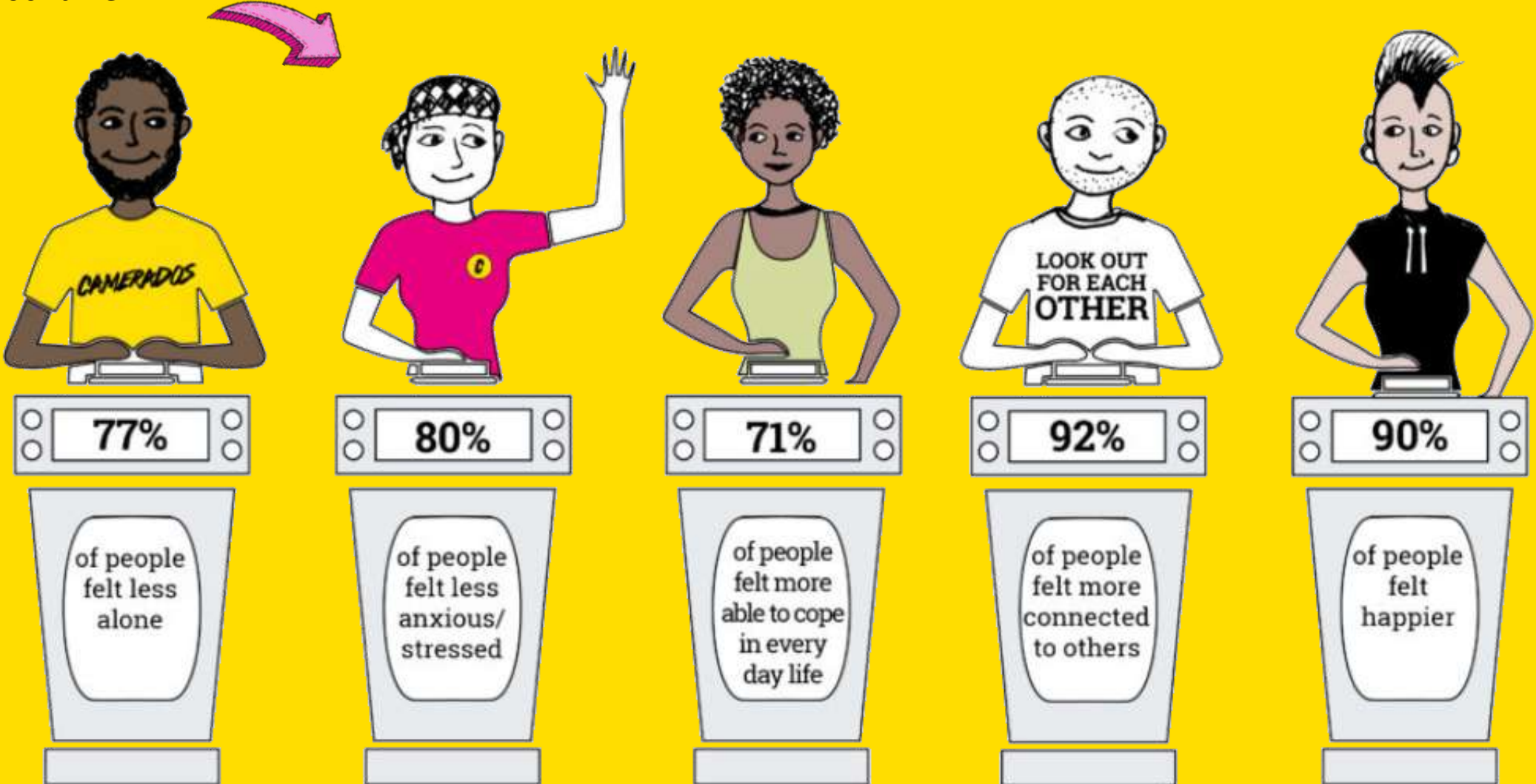
2015 - 2018 was a period of experimenting and prototyping with the team actively delivering projects in communities.

2018 - 2020 we open sourced our resources and constantly iterated using feedback from people using them in neighbourhoods and in a wide variety of locations - hospitals, parks, libraries, schools etc. With the help of Sheffield Hallam University and other partners analysing the work we felt that we had proof of concept by 2020 (for example, see graphic below of Stats)



2020 - 2025 is a period for Camerados about growing the movement, "A public living room in every neighbourhood"

we love this "Stats as Gameshow" graphic which is why we're showing you it AGAIN!!

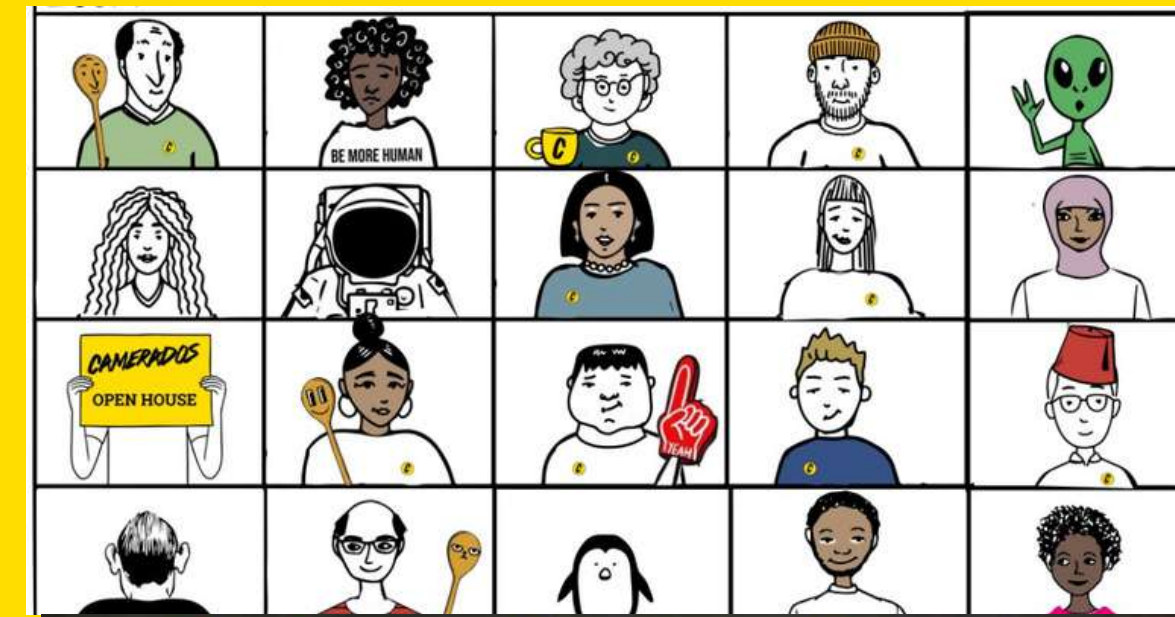
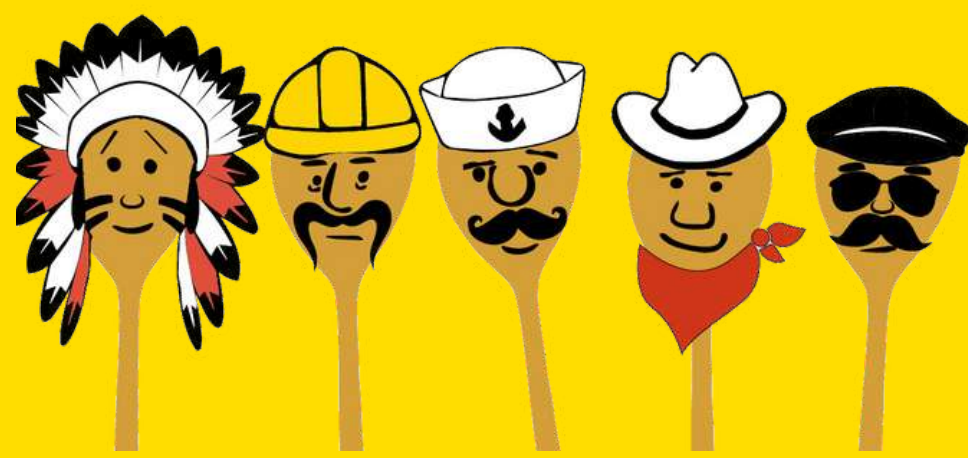


AND THEN...

Just as momentum was building and we secured funding to grow the movement for the next 5 years, the global pandemic hit in March 2020 and closed every single one of our public living rooms overnight.



THE STORY SO FAR CONTINUED...



Thanks to the skills and ideas of people in the movement we were able to react swiftly to the pandemic by re-inventing ourselves as a digital movement overnight. We never stopped working throughout successive lockdowns (see below "Camerados: The Covid Years").

The backbone of our pandemic response was a virtual public living room called SPOONROOM, where strangers met in a zoom call with a spoon.

We also created our own TV station, launched a virtual house party and helped communities set up physically distanced walks & park meet-ups.. It was a great example of how people can find a way to stay in contact and pull together. However we decided that digital was not our mission long term and we wanted to return to public living rooms and face to face contact, but people were nervous so...

Here's some of what's on this month:

- #OverABrew (Knitting Club)** - Every Thursday @ 7pm -
- #OverABrew (Book Club)** - TBC -
- Wednesday #SpoonRoom** - Every Week @ 7pm -
- Saturday #SpoonRoom** - Every Week @ 11am -
- #HouseParty 3** - Friday 14th @ 8pm -
- Open House** - Thursday 6th @ 2.30pm -

See you there #camerados

THE STORY SO FAR CONTINUED...

...we started with some street activism with our team joining local camerados in neighbourhoods across the country to wear giant pants in the street in order to start conversations with people about **"When life is pants what gets you through..."** This was a stepping stone to building people's confidence to be together again.



People wrote their answers on a giant black board and chatted in a public living room on the pavement.



This raised awareness of the movement and public living rooms again and soon almost every neighbourhood we visited left a legacy of an ongoing PLR. The key movement building device and follow up to interest is to send people the public living room in a box - see over...

See more amazing images and quotes from the streets here:



<https://tinyurl.com/4zsb9baz>



THE BOX THAT GIVES PERMISSION...

After the early years of figuring out how a public living room can work we now put everything we've learnt and lots of useful goodies in a box and send it to communities who want to create a public living room.

The 'Public Living Room in a Box' is simple - groups just have to add people and furniture.

Of course you don't really need a box to make a public living room but it seems to give people permission; it makes people feel part of something; it galvanises them.

It's also just a special lovely thing to receive in dark times.



NEW LEARNING APPROACH

Having carried out a traditional and more *quantitative* approach to learning with Sheffield Hallam University and felt confident about our proof of concept we are now wanting to deepen our understanding in *qualitative* ways of how groups work well together and how the movement can grow in a healthy and sustainable way. This is why we now work with the following people...

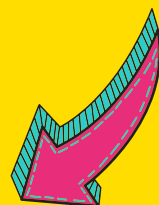


**Dr Hayley
Trowbridge...**

...is the Strategic lead for **People's Voice Media** which launched the Community Reporting movement in 2007. It's a method that uses digital tools to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways. We never want to harvest people's experience for our own ends so aim to honour people's stories ethically and respectfully.

PVM helped us build a continual learning process with an action research structure and the full detail can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/a7pzhzkc>



**Dr Martha
Newson...**

Martha is an **anthropologist** (you may know her from the TODAY programme or Sky news!) and she helps us understand what's happening in the movement and how we can constantly improve based on how people work.

Academically based at the Universities of Kent and Oxford, she leads research on group bonding, ritual, and community. From complex reoffending analysis with people in prison; to investigating football fans' stress hormones at live World Cup matches; to interviewing rave participants in warehouses across London



**Yvonne
Dawson...**

...works for the Association of Camerados and co-ordinates all our learning. She is the administrator for The Brain and makes sure all quantitative data and internet analytics are fed into it.

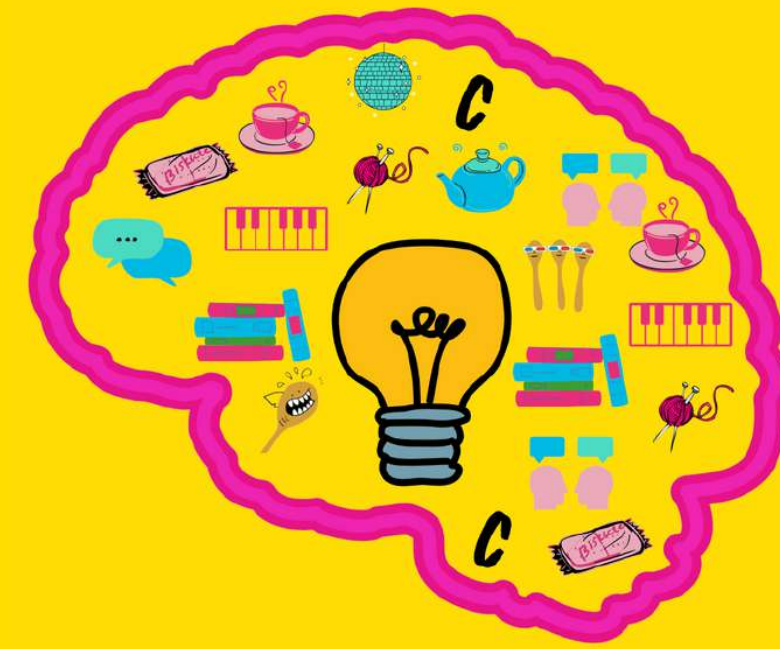
Because she speaks to communities every day this places our learning as close as possible to the people in the movement.

SOME THINGS WE LEARNT

Quarter 1 report : Please have a read here



<https://tinyurl.com/ymykxvxd>



But if you're in a hurry here's some headlines. People told us that they think the movement should...

CONTINUE:

- the **public living room idea is a winner** - people wanted to feel connected to their community; a PLR provides space for this.
- people valued being able to get to know people who are different than them; they thought that Camerados' spaces **mixed people well**
- the AOC team have always been **very quick to respond** and very supportive when it's not been going quite as well as we had hoped.
- Somewhere **to be a bit rubbish** is hugely valued

STRENGTHEN

- As anyone can get involved that can be **hard for someone who is introverted** to do.
- It's hard to reach the folk who are **isolated on line**
- Do we focus on '**negative**' things too much - Bit Shit, Xmas is Crap, Life is Pants - which is good, but shouldn't forget great things in life
- Idea that there isn't a "correct" way of doing a Public living room, every one is different. Some people felt they were "**doing it wrong**"



EXPLORE

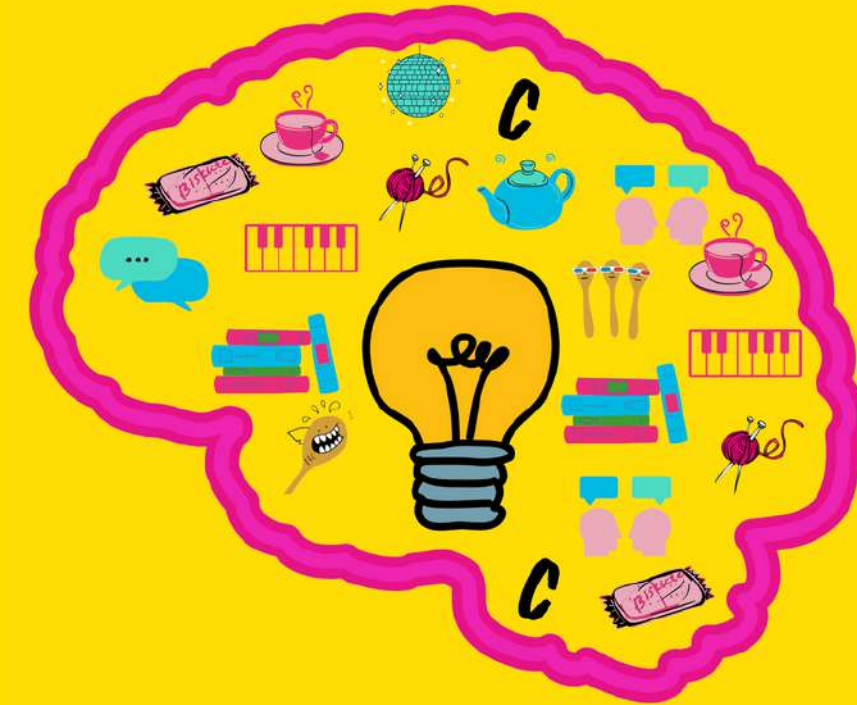
Involve **Social Prescribing** Practitioners at Doctors surgeries
Public living rooms **in offices** - especially large ones
More universities - ideas spread quickly (geographically)

SOME THINGS WE LEARN'T

Quarter 2 report : Please have a read here



<https://tinyurl.com/3yrm39rz>



Love this little 1 minute clip on "belonging" from the brain



<https://tinyurl.com/mrynwumz>

But if you're in a hurry here's some headlines. People told us that they think the movement should...

CONTINUE:

- Promoting the **principles** as a fundamental part of the Camerados movement and how the 'feel' of the public living room space is created. People love the principles.

STRENGTHEN

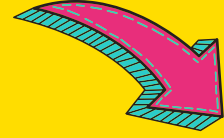
- The understanding that all PLRs are different and can be unique, and the sharing of learning and ideas across PLRs. There is **no one "correct" way** of doing it.

EXPLORE

How the PLR boxes could be more '**customisable**' and if boxes aimed at 'pop-up' or 'outdoor' PLRs could be developed.

SOME THINGS WE LEARNT

Dr Martha Newson insight report



<https://tinyurl.com/4xk2svdz>

Headline learnings so far and how we've acted on them...

Elders

We've been anxious about our council and associates because we didn't want to create a clique and a hierarchy. However Martha helped us understand that all clans have elders. She also helped us think through our strategy for Profiteroles (camerados who proliferate PLRs) and base them regionally so that a bond could form between elders and new adoptors.

Social Glue versus Social Superglue

Martha gave us a brilliant challenge around whether we're looking for die hard camerados who internalise the principles or passers by who like it while they're there but it's transitory. We realise of course that we need both and there are pros and cons of both.



Branding and identity

Martha's work with football clubs and fans showed us that symbols and branding matter to people and help them bond together with a collective purpose. We've always been anxious about whether our branding excludes people and lessens take up. Though we'll always be vigilant this has given us confidence to use it as a positive for people.

Age

It's in teenage yearas that kids stop seeing relationships in broad terms and talk about concepts such as "being kind" and realise there is nuance to it and power dynamics in relationships. When children are very young the parent-child is more clearly and markedly defined whereas In teenage years this changes. Camerados' nuance around the power involved in kindness - issues of bad kindess etc - are best discussed with teenage years. This has made us think hard about how to support Secondary schools in future.

CAMERADOS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

For some time the AoC had felt that the number of young people involved with the camerados movement needed to increase. Following a successful term spent with the pupils and staff at Church Cowley St James Primary in Oxford, there was a hunch that primary school children instinctively got what it was to be a camerado.

The AoC set out to test the hunch through a pilot with **6 primary schools dotted around the UK**, working alongside **Dr Tessa Reardon from Oxford University**.

During the summer term of 2020, emerging from the first lockdown, seven schools (6 primary and 1 infant, whose results were not included in the statistics) were recruited to take part in a Camerados in Primary Schools pilot starting in September 2020, using a mixture of physical, in person and website downloadable resources created in conjunction with an educational consultant.



CAMERADOS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In the Autumn of 2021, the final report from Oxford University was published, below is a summary of key findings.

Children's perceptions had 4 key themes:

- **Inclusion and respect: 'letting people in and not letting people left out'**
- **Personal qualities of a Camerado: 'being kind'**
- **Help, support and be there for others: 'helps me with my day'**
- **Friendship and fun: 'having fun is easy'**

A few key statistics from the staff:

- **85%** of school staff said a camerado was considerate towards others
- **55%** of school staff described being a Camerado as providing help and support, and of these, more than a quarter specifically mention looking out for others and a fifth mentioned through tough times.
- **31%** Of school staff felt that the powerful principles were a critical feature of the resources.
- **72%** Of school staff said that Camerados had a benefit for the wider community

A few key statistics from the children:

- **54%** of children think being a camerado is about inclusion and respect.
- **90%** of children described being a camerado as helping, supporting and being there for other people.
- **39%** of children think camarados is about friendship and fun.
- **68%** of children described a camerado as a kind person.

CAMERADOS: THE COVID YEARS

For a detailed breakdown on our Covid learning please read our full [Covid learning report](https://tinyurl.com/4cx8d42e) here: -

<https://tinyurl.com/4cx8d42e>:

SPOON ROOM

After PLRs closed we asked the movement what to do. A Camerado in Berlin had the idea to create virtual public living rooms using tech she was using in her business and adapting a format she used for listening circles. "Spoon Room" was born - a zoom call for strangers where you bring a spoon.

The spoon is like a talking stick and everyone gets 3 mins after which you wave the spoon when you want to talk, otherwise videocalls can become messy with people talking over each other. All calls started with music, fun and quoting the camarados principles. This no fixing, no agenda space became a lifeline for many during this time especially the lockdown periods.



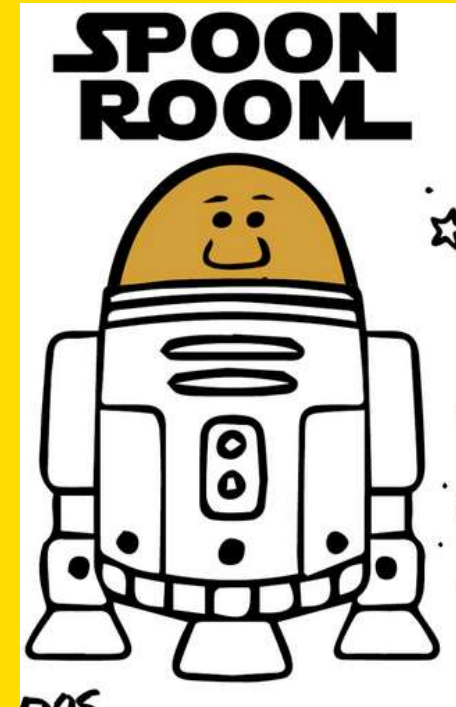
CAMERADOS: THE COVID YEARS

SPOON ROOM (CONTINUED)



We open sourced the format and it was picked up by people in housing associations, mental health teams, social workers and people in their own communities.

There were Spoonrooms in Germany, Portugal and in New Zealand and Hawaii.



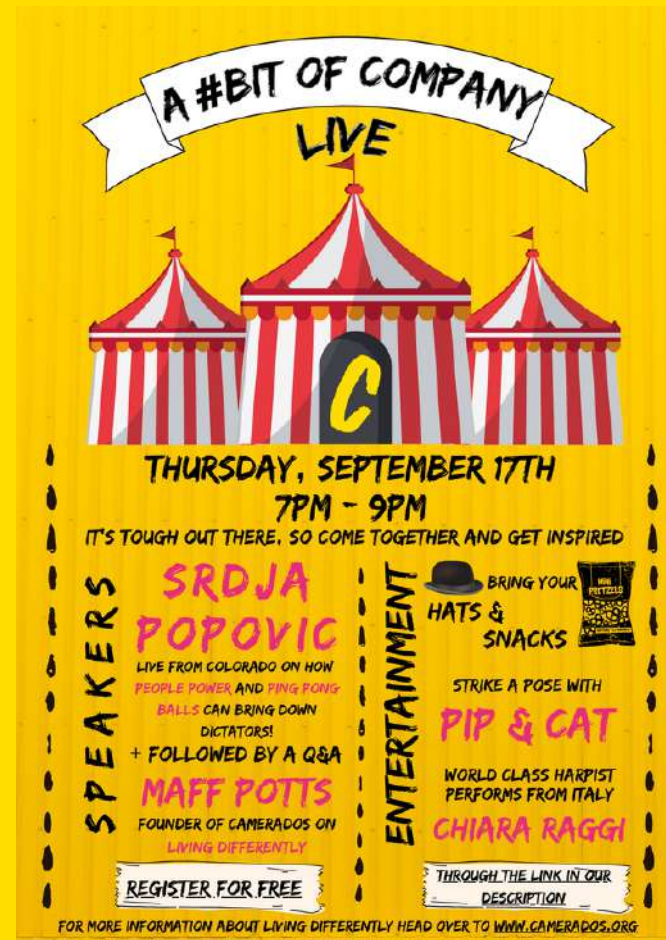
Year	Number of Spoon Rooms	Number of individuals who took part	Number of registrations
2020	87	367	1,914
2021	89	139	1,570

The AOC team hosted a SpoonRoom every Saturday and eventually Wednesday too for two years.

One thing that didn't work well: in the early days when we were new to zoom calls we didn't have a registration process and just issued an open link. We were zoombombed badly after two months and



ON LINE CAMFPIRE



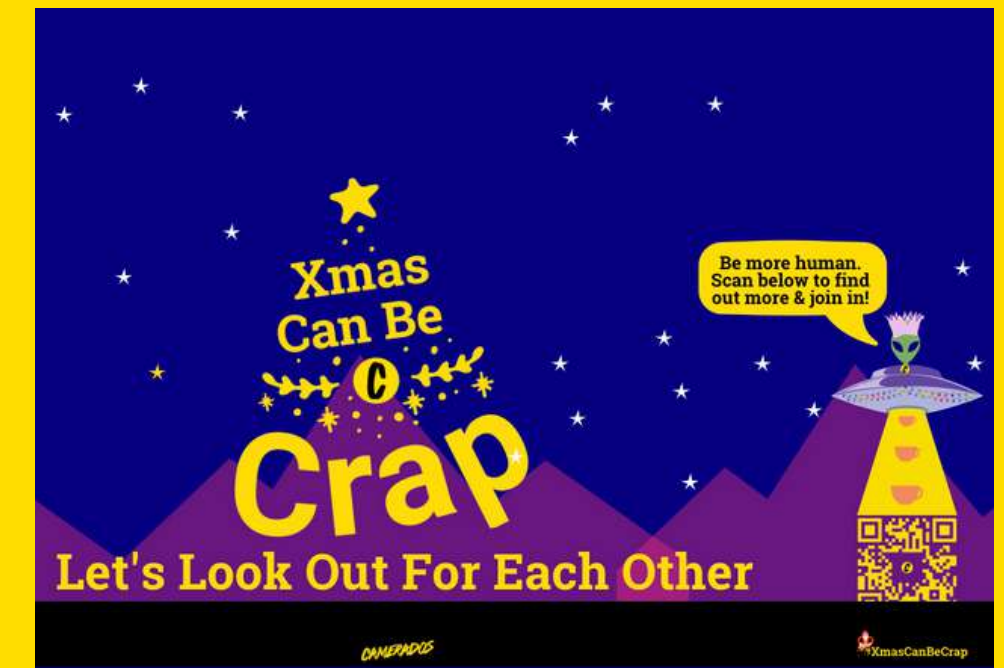
On 17 September 2020 'A Bit of Company Live' was held, a 2 hour get together of Camerados from across the movement, creating an online version of a Camerados Campfire. 116 PEOPLE registered and 60 people came along to hear Srdja Popovic speak and ask him questions, listen to a world class harpist from Italy (who became part of the movement through SpoonRooms), follow the stories of 2 people and why they joined camerados as well as a general opportunity to chat in breakout rooms about all things Camerados.

ISOLATION AT XMAS



A series of 4 interactive shows in the run up to Christmas were planned for each Friday throughout December, all streamed live on Facebook apart from a final recorded version shown on Christmas Day. The hour-long shows were each hosted by different members of the movement alongside the AoC Arts and Activism Lead and including sketches, dancing, improv games, and got the movement involved by getting them to send in films of their party tricks.

We also ran an activism campaign where people attached posters to benches in public spaces during the christmas period to let people who struggled with xmas know that they weren't alone and asking them all to look out for each other



TV STATION

In the Autumn of 2020 the AoC, the movement and People's Voice Media (PVM) worked in partnership to find out how folk felt about the Covid-19 pandemic. The project was in three parts; **collection of stories, producing chat shows and taking what had been learnt out to communities.**

Using the Community Reporting Technique and designated SpoonRooms, the experiences and stories of over 65 folk from across the movement were collected and told in 5 insight reports. These were the themes that affected people's lives during the pandemic:

- **Digital connectivity and inclusion.**
- **Sense of loss in all forms and how life seemed on pause.**
- **Our wellbeing and reconnecting to our own creativity and nature.**
- **The impact of isolation and lack of human connection.**
- **Existing inequalities were highlighted.**

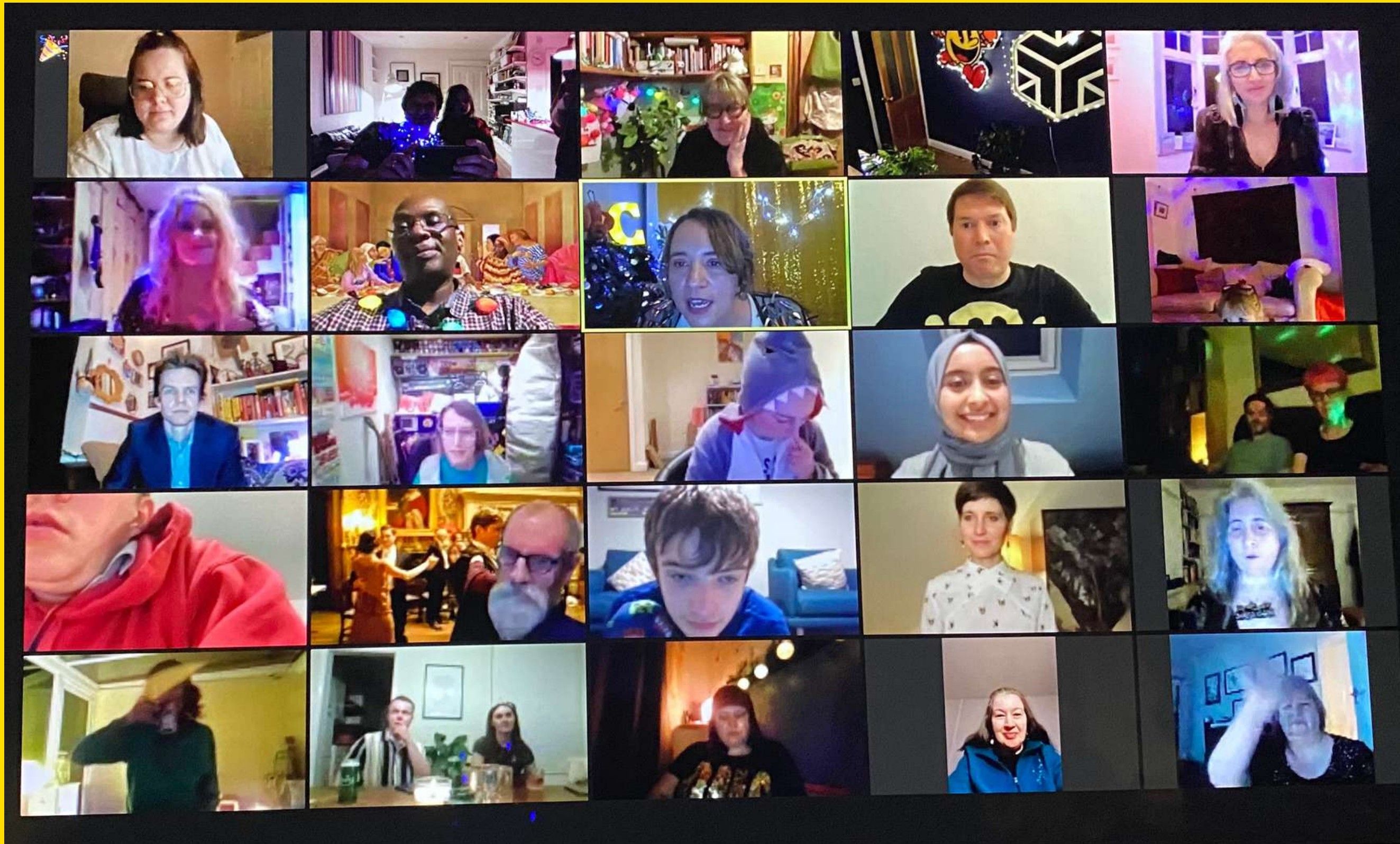


These themes were used to create a series of **10 live chat shows** (2 per theme) in January and February 2021. Each show was hosted by a movement member with one person who gave their story as a guest, along with sketches, songs and snippets of stories from others on the same theme. The shows were co-created by a group of movement members who gave their time alongside staff from PVM and the AoC, showing that movement folk were happy to join in and take an active creative and organising role. In particular several movement members said that it gave them some purpose during a time of another lockdown.

What didn't work well again though was the viewing figures, even fewer folk watched than compared to the Bit of Company Lite, table below shows views on facebook but views across all social media were similar.

HOUSE PARTY

In early 2021 it was becoming clear that Covid was going to be around for much longer...



...and on entering the third lockdown the movement wanted to have the chance to come together, lift each other's spirits and keep the connections going that they had made through 2020.

The AoC and movement members came together and came up with HouseParty, an online version of a party, each one having a mix of music, craft, spoken word and the opportunity to just meet others and chat. Using Zoom as the technical platform, each breakout room being a different room at the party, the concept being trying to emulate the idea of moving from room to room as you would at a real in person event.

OVER A BREW

One of the learnings from SpoonRoom was that some folk found it hard to step into an unknown space online. The movement suggested that offering an activity could help distract from the anxiety of coming to something new and give folk the chance to connect. #OverABrew was born.

Knitting #OverABrew began, held weekly on a Thursday evening, the idea soon expanded to Books, Building Lego, Paper Cutting, and one brilliantly entitled "Chat Shit and Eat Cake". The knitting group is a particularly regular and resilient bunch who have found their own way of making the format work even re-inventing the principles to fit knitting parlance (see below) and are a very self contained unit that now need little to no support from AOC.



#OVER A BREW



54 #OverABrew sessions were held in 2021 with 11 movement hosts and 56 individuals taking part over the year, some attending multiple events

STREET ACTIVISM

In the summer of 2021 the movement told us it wanted to make tentative steps towards face to face work again. Plus there was a strong desire to re-ignite and get public living rooms back open.

“This is something that has stopped me in my tracks today- you have made me think, and yet it's so simple”

The movement were involved in designing the tour, its concept of ‘When Life is Pants’ came from a camerados council member using our favourite kind of activism - **Laughtervism**.

The tour went to **Norwich, Wolverhampton, Greater Manchester, Aylesham, Middlesbrough, Hackney, and Rotherham.**

In 2022 so far it has gone to **Blackpool, Preston, Castle Donnington, Wrexham, Falkirk, Stirling, Cumnock, Doncaster, Wolverhampton, Edinburgh**

CAMERADOS
OF THE STREETS

WE'RE HITTING THE STREETS IN THESE PLACES...



“When you put giant pants on, it makes you chat with people in a different way”

‘Everyone needs 5 minutes everyday to come to a place like this, I sit in this spot everyday and no-one talks to me, having this here means I’ve met people I’d never have known’

STREET ACTIVISM

The 2021 and 2022 street activism has left a legacy of two things.

- We've sent out 100 pairs of giant underpants* to communities for them to do it themselves and...
- The "pavement PLRs" have emerged as a hugely effective way to meet members of the public without ANY interest in community action, mental health, anti-isolation work etc. We meet people literally on street level - so we're going to continue this and expand it.

'You have made space for everyone, people think that I am weird, but that's o.k here isn't it'

What worked	What didn't
Fantastic percentage (65%) of take-up (public living room requests) from neighbourhoods where street activity took place. 11 areas followed through and set up Public Living Rooms.	No direct correlation between increase in movement/email sign ups in those areas where street activity took place.
Blackboard - Folk could write their own messages on what gets them through tough days.	Pinatas, bubbles and tik tok stage made it seem more like a children activity event less time for chatting
Setting up a cosy space for folk to sit in - meant people felt they could stop a while, sit and connect.	Being in parks had less footfall from bypassers.
Giant pants - great conversation starters and social media content, fun way to engage. Tik tok videos	Spent a lot of time creating a QR code with a microsite to engage passers by - people didn't use it. Are QR codes the right mechanism for us to <u>use</u> .
Being on pavements in towns - visible and no threshold to cross, folk engaged with the space.	

**Nice sidebar story - our giant pants are manufactured by "The Sewing Rooms" a social enterprise in Skelmersdale that employs women who are from prison and long term unemployed*

ARTS ACTIVISM

A big part of AOC's role is to inspire people to join the movement, find out about the 6 principles, use them in their daily life and hopefully feel inspired to create a public living room in their neighbourhood.

The *organisational* model of change uses paid staff to take action whereas the movement model (in camerados case) requires people to feel moved to act voluntarily. So rather than instructing people, movements spread using tools that move people - stories, poetry, music and art.



The first of our murals are in Rotherham inside the grounds of Coleridge primary school and facing outwards to the community. This is the school which embraced camerados more than any other during our schools pilot and continue to use our principles every week.



The community is very culturally diverse and has many significant challenges. It seemed right to put our first mural here. We ran a selection process for the artists and let the school pupils choose the winning design as well as decide the brief for the image.

OUR OWN KIND OF GOVERNANCE

The Association of Camerados

- This is a charitable, not for profit, Community Interest Company (CIC) with 3 board members - one Exec and two non-exec.
- the team working in an outbuilding in Oxfordshire **inspiring, resourcing and connecting** the movement.

The team has been pretty constant for the last two years and was in one of its periods of expansion reaching 7 team members (3 F/T and 4 P/T/). Our board voted to ensure we cannot be larger than 8 staff members because we learnt between 2015 - 2018 that small teams achieve more.

Sure enough we have retracted again in the last 6 months and by September will be 3 staff members. This has happened very amicably through natural changes and some changing needs such as a requirement to have more experienced strategic comms input to accelerate movement growth. The most significant change was the departure of Jenny Fox our CEO. She was one of the first people to join Maff in creating the movement in Year One and was fundamental in the formation of much of what we do. Her departure signals a significant shift towards the leadership coming more from the movement in our next phase. The decreasing of size of the AOC is a great opportunity to hand more and more activity over to the movement (see Profiteroles below).



The team
2020 - 2022



The Board unti Feb 2022
Jenny (left) replaced by Bob Thust

OUR OWN KIND OF GOVERNANCE

Camerados Council

9 members of the movement who support and challenge the AoC to stay on mission. Wildly different backgrounds, personalities and circumstances but all feel a deep connection to the mission. They are all gifted with great empathy, intelligence and insight and love to debate our work, it's a powerhouse of a group.

Some are in weekly contact with AOC team via Whatsapp and the group meet up every two months. They produce an annual mission review about what they think of AOC's performance in support of the mission and movement. The pandemic delayed this but the **next one is due out before Christmas 2022 - watch this space!**

They have no legal responsibility for the CIC which we believe gives them more freedom than "trustees" to speak and act freely on behalf of the mission not preservation of the charity.

LEARNING: We re-recruited council members at the start of the pandemic and although we attracted a wider selection of people from a greater geographical spread this provided challenges. The group started to work much better once they met in person, further proof that human connection matters!. The council are now a close group but inevitably have varying degrees of involvement depending on life circumstances.



OUR OWN KIND OF GOVERNANCE

Associates

AoC is a tiny team but works with many associates from Sonder Communications to The Sewing Rooms (a social enterprise of women who make all our giant underpants) to various others who help us with design work, merchandise, website etc.

One set of Associates who are going to play a key role going forward are...

The Proliferators (AKA The Profiteroles)

These are members of the movement particularly proficient in *proliferating* public living rooms.

They have played a role in creating multiple PLRs and we want to use their expertise to grow the movement.

They will visit new public living rooms, inspire others, ensure the principles are being adhered to (but through conversations not an inspectorate!) and be spokespeople for Camerados movement.



CONCLUSION?



People are telling our learning partners that Camerados helps them get through tough times. Neighbourhoods keep creating public living rooms - several boxes going out every week far and wide. Also agencies working with people through the cost of living crisis tell us their neighbourhoods desperately need something like this. So we think it's working and useful.

We've gone from major momentum in 2019 to pandemic shutdown, then to major re-invention, and now back to our original concept and major momentum again. Sheesh!

Not all of our "*inspiring & resourcing & connecting*" of the movement has worked and we've had to relentlessly iterate on the occasions when we have failed to engage people. However overall we've emerged from the pandemic with deeper relationships with the movement and the highest level of take up of public living rooms thus far. **Considering our mission is to reduce the social distance between people it's astonishing that we survived a global pandemic which mobilised the world's governments to stop that very thing from happening!**

It's possible that the goodwill from our relentless pandemic activity partly contributed to the major rebound of public living rooms or perhaps people just recognised how much they'd missed human connection. Most significantly we have strengthened our network of those camerados in the movement who want to give more time to it and lead it (eg our council and profiteroles). Our learning too is starting to teach us how groups and how connections work.

We still haven't cracked our communications. Compared to others we have a small following on social media and don't have name recognition or profile beyond a few sectors. We have to decide whether that's important to us or whether our growth can continue to happen organically and perhaps profile would bring problems and the wrong behaviours anyway?

AoC team has shrunk and although always difficult to lose talent and adjust to workloads, this does fit with our continued aim to increase movement ownership and decrease AOC's organisational involvement so although we didn't plan to shrink at this stage it is helping us take the steps we need to.

We never know what's round the corner but here is where we think the future leads us...

...AND THE FUTURE

- **More public living rooms in neighbourhoods so people get through tough times.**
- **Engaging with those most struggling with the cost of living crisis.**
- **Even more street activism with Pavement Public living Rooms**



- **Increased involvement and leadership from the movement**
- **Increase number of spokespeople from the movement** lessening the reliance on the founder, Maff, and promoting our diversity
- **Greater quality assurance** through Council insight & gentle guiding by our Profiteroles visiting public living rooms for tea and stories.
- Figuring out a way to "connect" the movement more via **campfires & events** - could this be the major role for AoC in future?



- **Greater use of our principles** in multiple sectors working with people who are struggling
- **Greater public awareness & engagement** that leads to more public living rooms - basically finally crack Comms!!
- **Continued iteration of the resources** that AoC provides both on-line and physically - perhaps reducing the reliance on the box?
- **Period of stability** for AOC team
- World peace and a way to wash **socks** without losing them*

*just kidding



WELL DONE YOU GOT TO THE END! THANK YOU FOR READING THIS!

Please holler if there's anything you want to dig into or talk about - there's a lot here.

And we REALLY do mean it - WE'D LOVE TO HEAR MORE FROM YOU and help your work in any way we can.

Thanks again for your support and encouragement, you rock!

AOC
August 2022

