

Placecast Episode 14 - Transcript

Nicola Headlam

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham.

Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government, based on the view that it is only through animating the power of place-based leadership the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable. Whether you're a researcher, citizen scientist, an activist, a professional working in the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst, or entrepreneur, we think that it's through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested, and the learning shared before we go again, and that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts.

We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme funded by the ESRC and Innovate UK. The podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence-based ways of working and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society. Our guests are change-makers from across the UK, with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved.

We focus, in particular, on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership, as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

I'm Nicola Headlam, a policy fellow within City-REDI and I'm here today with Angela Jeffrey, Sara Jones and Saidul Haque Saeed.

Angela is an LPIP fellow working in the Communities theme. She works in communities as the co-chair of Birmingham Citizens as well as working on the regeneration of Newtown in Birmingham and co-developed the Newtown cultural placemaking strategy with Legacy Centre of Excellence, residents, businesses and other stakeholders in Newtown.

She work in the community connections team in Birmingham Community Healthcare Trust to address health inequalities and is an Executive Director at Saathi House, which is a woman-based charity based in Aston that is a beacon of female empowerment and positivity.

Hello Angela.

Mentioned in the Birmingham Post's power list of the top 10 campaigners in the region, Saidul Haque Saeed is the lead organiser for Citizens UK, supervising its work in the West Midlands and supervising the development of professional organisers and civil society leaders. As a local resident with others, he co-led his community's response to the Lozells riots of 2005, resulting in no incidents in the area during further riots of 2011 in the city.

He consequently co-founded an award-winning social enterprise, still winning change for residents in the area today.

Since 2012, he's built Birmingham Citizens, a powerful independent community organising alliance of city civil society organisations. He's trained hundreds of local leaders to win notable social justice campaigns, on youth mental health, community safety, the real living wage, refugee resettlement and housing. In recognition of this, he's been awarded honorary doctorates by the two universities in the city.

Between January 23 and October 2025, he oversaw the strengthening of Greater Manchester citizens and is currently developing a new civil society alliance in the Black Country with local leaders.

Welcome, Saidul.

And Sara, Sara Jones is the Professor of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Birmingham and Academic Lead for the University's cultural partnerships initiative, Culture Forward. Culture Forward is a network of 140 cultural and community organisations across Birmingham and more than 160 academic and professional services colleagues working together to bring the university and city into closer and more creative collaborations. She led a project with Citizens UK on migration myth busting.

Working with Citizens UK to design A toolkit that could be used to help deliver community briefings, aiming to counter myths about migration and supporting communities to live better with difference.

Hi, Sara.

Gosh, what an august panel I have. Maybe we could start by just telling me how you got into this kind of work and how you've worked together over time.

Angela Jeffery

Yes, a while ago I was at Aston University as their Director of Innovation and was asked to move across and work on regional society which as the university became a civic university.

So I started off just looking around thinking the partnerships that the university already had and Professor Monder Ram had been involved with Citizens UK for several years before that he actually moved from University of Birmingham to Aston University and so through Mondar I then engaged with Citizens UK just at the time I was looking at how we might develop partnerships and so we'd also got a relationship with Aston Villa Foundation and we applied for some funding from UKRI to do an eye health listening project and that involved working with Citizens UK and their member institutions and going to visit nine different community groups with Aston Optometrists, Linguists, Centre for Enterprise and in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship and the Aston Villa Foundation so that we could really understand what barriers were holding them back from having the best eye health possible.

And that actually unearthed a whole way of doing things. It was basically a blueprint for it, engaging with communities, which Saeed was absolutely integral in. And also the trust that he already had with those communities meant that they then trusted me and I built up relationships with them as well. And that informed the civic university agreement that we had at Aston.

I then joined the leadership group and then became co-chair the years after that. And it's been a really rewarding journey where I've just felt that I've really I really enjoyed working with that team, understanding the issues that people in the local area face and being able to make sure that those have sort of surfaced with people in power has been really important.

And then more recently, I met Sara through Culture Forward, but also through the work that she's been doing with Citizens UK.

Nicola Headlam

So it sounds like you've worked for a long time with Saeed. Are you a community activist?

Angela Jeffery

I think a long time ago I was a community activist, thinking about climate, but that was being a vegetarian and sort of gradually moved over to looking at social justice.

But the listening that we did was really powerful in terms of when people talked about poverty, poor housing, lack of digital literacy, health inequalities, and the lack of ability to speak English and not having enough funding for ESOL for them to even be able to get onto courses just made me feel like this is something that we really need to address and make

sure that people that are talking about supporting communities are actually doing things to make a difference.

Nicola Headlam

Saidul. Could you say something about your collaboration?

Saidul Haque Saeed

When I got involved in what's called broad-based community organising, it's not new in the UK. Originally, it's from a huge amount of work from the civil rights movement in the US, sorry. And my interest in broad-based community organising came, so I used to be, I'm an alumnus from COS, College of Social Science at UOB. And you knew that if you put power and the dynamics of power in your essays, you got more marks.

That was always the thing, like what's going to get you over that 50%? In the safe zone, so you don't have to do that assignment again, was talk about power. But no one really taught you about how that worked in practice. There was a huge amount of theory, you know, with what you're learning in social policy and sociology.

And then when I finished university in 2001, you know, September 11th, and the world started changing in 2005, the riots in part of the neighborhood I lived. And so I got heavily involved in what you would call activism, residents, neighborhood forums, groups, and went to almost everything that the council invited its local community to, but inevitably that was going to lead to burnout. And I couldn't understand there was one denominator which was power again. And you couldn't spot, like, you know, people talking about empowering communities. What they really meant is you turning up to an event and you taking part in a survey or, you know, the thing I talk a lot about, the amount of face painting and open days that they were, and you're saying the communities are harmonious because we've had a face paint open day in the park.

Yes, they're one of them. Now, they're good. I'm not knocking them. And Angela has heard me talk about them for ages, I'm sure, so has Sara.

But what I was intrigued about is what was going on in East London for almost 2 decades by then, called community organising, which were actually reshaping the word power between local people and those who had the power, decision makers, councils, big businesses. And no one was really looking at a model like that.

Everybody were really about, well, come, yeah, a service level agreement to deliver services. And we think we can deliver lots of services and as a result we can empower

people. Well no, you're just sometimes substituting what the state's supposed to do. So my intrigue came when I switched to become a community organiser in 2012 for a year and you know 14 years later I'm still here.

And what's been really intriguing working with both Angela and with Sara is things have shifted massively, definitely over the last 10 years, from the refugee welcome movement in 2015, with the Syrian war, to Brexit in 2016, to the financial crisis in 2018, to the pandemic and cost of living crisis we're going through right now. And as a result, we start to see a huge amount of power of the algorithm, for want of a better word. Those things on WhatsApp on our mobile phones.

And it was a conversation that I had with a senior politician, I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say, just before the last general election, where the concerns about myths of immigration wasn't just in a neighborhood which wasn't so diverse, but probably one of the most diverse parts of Birmingham, where people were perpetuating myths about housing, about who got a job, and also things around safety.

And so it was really brilliant to have an opportunity to speak to Sara and colleagues around kind of what can we do at it and what might be that we can try that's a bit different.

I won't steal Sara's thunder, but it got our interest in Citizens UK because it definitely wasn't another face painting Open Day, but actually starting to talk about some of these troubled themes. You know, we've had at least two summers of riots in getting communities to unpack it in a way without being accosted to the algorithm.

Nicola Headlam

Sara, talking about the project work that you've done, I guess it must have been more about power than about face painting.

Sara Jones

I mean, I love it when there is face painting, because my kids absolutely enjoy having their faces painted, and it does make it a little bit easier. So I can see the desire to have face painting at events.

But no, so I guess from my perspective, obviously I'm a researcher, so I came at this from a research lens. I tend to be quite eclectic in the things that I'm interested in, but actually power is... probably the one thing that unites the various things that I've done in my career. And the last 10 years, a lot of the research I've done has been around transnational

memory and then also that kind of intersection between memory studies and migration studies.

I had a large Research Council funded project called Post-Socialist Britain, which explored the experiences of Polish, German and Ukrainian migrants in the UK. And then kind of that work naturally led to some community-engaged and policy-focused advocacy for particularly Ukrainians in the UK, particularly around the charity that they're experiencing with their visa status, as in they've got no pathway to settlement, therefore no pathway to citizenship. And that then led to some conversations with Citizens UK around and the migration and refugee organising team around their campaign for fair and timely citizenship for everybody living in the UK, which then led to kind of these much broader conversations.

And then I was talking to Syed Amina from that team, and we were talking about migration myths and how harmful they are, particularly in the context of the riots in 2024 in that summer, and what could we do about it. And it so happened there was a funding call open at the university. So we thought, well, let's try and get a project where we can co-design with community leaders a toolkit for them to then deliver these myth-busting briefings in their communities.

So we quite quickly put together that funding application in the autumn of '24 and then started the project in 2025 and kind of the work has really built from there.

Nicola Headlam

So I guess... So the theme that unites, so you're taking the approach of Citizens UK work working and that approach to community organising. Is it worth just for a UK audience talking about different strands of kind of community power and mobilisation?

Again, the London citizens model has always been very much about holding feet to the fire in terms of certainly successive mayors of London and having quite radical asks, in fact, of candidates, things like asylum amnesty for different sectors of workers and things.

So maybe you could tell us something more about why Birmingham and Citizens UK are a good match.

Saidul Haque Saeed

So I'm a staunch Brummie, right? Anything from the M25 has to work really hard to get my attention back in 2012. And I think it was the thing about communities as anchored by civil

society organisations, whether it's universities to an amazing charity like Saathi House, nearly 50 years in Brum, across the road from Villa Park to places of worship, can actually build their own independent power as a stakeholder. As opposed to be a respondent to what statutory agencies like the local authority come up with in strategies every 5 minutes. It fills an average assignment. It's like three years really.

And so what was really helpful for me was to see how independent from what the council's latest consultation was or what the NHS's latest consultation was. People were coming up with a joint agenda on what was putting pressure on them and what they wanted to see and working out how is the best way of getting that delivered.

So the example that was really interesting from London. One of the reasons was the living wage campaign, which is probably the most successful community organising campaign in recent times in the UK, with over 600 employees in the West Midlands alone paying the real living wage, voluntarily, even through the cost of living crisis. And how they won that campaign through powerful stories, through assemblies, through someone asking the boss of a bank, "How much is the price of milk? I clean your office".

And so the power of testimony to [inaudible] sophisticated unpacking the decision-making was really intriguing. And also, we use the analogy in Birmingham. It's like, imagine trying to go to Birmingham city centre, where the council house is where the police is in courts is, all of those places where big corporate businesses are, trying to get to the city centre sat on the number 11. So the number 11 is the outer ring bus route.

And so it kind of felt like a lot of stuff that I was doing in community, I was sat on the number 11, going round the houses, actually like going to meetings in the evening. Yeah, getting fat as I used to describe it. Whereas what I needed to do was sit on the number 16, all of the other bus routes, I'd take you right to the city centre much quicker and get to the point.

And so that was really intriguing about how community power was quite assertive, but at the same time they did lovely things like gave garlands and like celebrate and sang songs and all of those wonderful things that you didn't expect from what I got to see in the city from lots of angry activists who used to give themselves palpitations in meetings about the things that they really cared a lot about.

So it was the method, but also the massive participation of people, like hundreds of people. Like, we are weeks away from getting nearly 900 people in the University of Birmingham's Great Hall pre-local elections on things about child poverty. Like, of course, bins is the number one issue in Brum, but like for one night, we're not talking about bins. The actual physical participation of hundreds of people who are doing politics, who are

interested in elections, who in 2017, when we did our pre-election, election assembly for the mayoral elections, which remember there was a referendum. People didn't even want that. They didn't want a mayoral elections. But 968 people in a room in the Great Hall, what on earth about this election that people said, no, well, why were they interested in coming for one evening?

And it was really about the power of people in the same room looking at each other thinking, right, we've got the same issues, and demonstrated by schools, churches, mosque community groups, mobilising people, telling people, look, this is what you care about. You've told us in coffee mornings. Here's a chance to do something, so that was really intriguing, and that got over the last 14 years we've come across lots of examples where we've managed to get change happen without being sat on the number 11, and there's interesting examples of how that happened. So, for me, community organising, yes, it's about people power in a room.

Angela Jeffery

The thing that I've found really powerful about Citizens has been the fact that we always do rounds before we start a meeting, which really builds understanding of where people are coming from.

So sometimes we talk about just what's putting pressure on you, or what are you looking forward to this year, or something where it's a bit more personal than any other meeting that I've ever been to. But it then builds so that the leadership team feel like we're actually friends rather than just being colleagues. And then when you understand people and you're all saying actually, our communities are feeling like they don't have enough money or they haven't got a house. Everyone comes together around the issues that bring us together rather than dividing us.

And I think the fact that Citizens UK National decided to have organising across difference as one of their priorities last year then kind of builds on that and just really frames the fact that Citizens UK is really about everybody working together for the common good.

Nicola Headlam

I read your very august list of scholarly publications and one word stuck out for me, you've done work on conviviality and working, helping to foster those conversations. I wonder if you could say something about that.

Sara Jones

Yeah, I mean, that's also one of the other origin stories, I guess, of the myth-busting project, is that work. That was actually part of that large research project that I mentioned, exploring the experiences of Polish, German and Ukrainian migrants in the UK. And one of the strands was actually called Communities. And we worked with a local partner, Centrala, which is an Eastern European art gallery in Birmingham, to deliver photography workshops for anybody who lived in Hyson Green or had an association with Hyson Green near Nottingham and West Bromwich near Birmingham.

And we didn't really have an expectation of what this would deliver, but the idea was that people would come together, they'd get training in something quite specific, which was photography. That wasn't by me. I'm not a good photographer, but I had a colleague that I worked with who delivered the photography training. They'd go out and take pictures of the local area, and then they'd come back and talk about them. And the idea was that would kind of elicit sharing around their stories, their experiences, and also very much across difference.

So we had people in the workshops, so there were 40 workshops in total, 4 series of 10 workshops. We had people from 14 different countries in those workshops across that time, and also people who'd lived in Hyson Green for 70 years, like literally all their lives.

And what we found was that shared goal, which was the photography and the exhibition that we had at the end of it, alongside the kind of friendly convivial atmosphere that we created, allowed people to share across difference, which is not to say there wasn't any conflicts or any difficult discussions in those sessions, but it really meant people were finding, actively seeking out points of commonality. So creating that kind of idea of conviviality, which means to live with difference.

And I think that is something that we also then took forward to thinking about how we were going to deliver the myth-busting briefings, was firstly the value setting, the story sharing, but also the shared purpose, and then not trying to erase difference, not trying to erase conflict, but to find ways of living with that difference in communities.

Nicola Headlam

Very interesting. So then my first area of questioning is about the power of place. But I suppose the place is really about the ways in which you know Birmingham as a place. So I wonder if you can imagine for me the potential for a Birmingham where the kind of work that you do is fully mature, fully embedded. What change can you imagine and what might

the size of that prize be? That might be to the structures as you've described them, Saeed, of the organisations at the centre. I wonder if you could say something about that. What would a citizens organised Birmingham look like that might be different?

Saidul Haque Saeed

Oh, so imagine the world as it could be, to the world as it is?

I think I trust between communities and two groups of institutions. One is the institutions that they rely on a lot like civil society, school churches, mosques and community groups. Just we work with them, they're our membership, but they've got to work hard to maintain and sustain and strengthen trust with their parents, service users, worshippers. So high level of trust with the kind of mediators, but also high trust with decision makers.

And there's lots around nowadays to make you be angry about people in power, from politicians to officials, but actually creating a two-way relationship. So it's not just about what is the local authority, what's the police, what's the NHS going to do for me. It's like, what's the accountability that's two-way between community represented, whether they're civil society and statutory agencies.

And as a result, we get things done by we're not doing another conference with another posting knot on walls about what should the strategy for XYZ look like.

We're able to deliver on some of the challenges that we're not going to be able to completely poverty free or I'd love it to be poverty free but we know that there's a safety net in the city for people based on high amount of trust between agencies and communities and like a habit of getting on and delivering things.

An example is Birmingham has a commitment to a temporary accommodation charter. Like what's the minimum standards you can expect? There's 5,000 families in temporary accommodation in the city, one of the highest outside of Newham in London. But that was pledged to come into life in June 2023. We're approaching June 2026.

So those are some of the things like young people have told statutory agencies, and this is really important to students of the university, like what do you offer as paid placements and work experience?

And if we're one of a world city, a global city, some of the stuff that you do within City-REDI and you have global mayors come in, like one of the most challenging and dare I say embarrassing things is Googling the work experience page or the local authority and other statutory agencies.

Some of this stuff does not need big strategies and years to do it. Some of them is like sitting in a room with some people and figuring out and just putting it on. Imagine if, startups were doing it. So getting on, getting things done, but based on high level of trust built, even when we make mistakes, so not just when we're getting things done when we make mistakes. And that would reduce the need for a lot of the campaigning that we find ourselves involved in.

Nicola Headlam

So I wonder if I could then think about, so that kind of high trust, Angela, you mentioned talking about if universities were truly civic in their outlook, what kind of world might that look like? How would that be different?

Angela Jeffery

That's a big question. So building trust between different groups is really important in terms of public services, businesses and communities, because I think quite often you end up with public services and communities working together and then you get businesses and public services and not so much of the all three of them together. And I think if we did some of that more of the joining of the dots between those different groups, then we might get a lot further.

I mean, I know the City Council's been doing quite a bit of work in terms of capacity building of some community groups so that they're more trusted by the city council and then also by business.

They've also been doing things around like Match My Project, where companies that they procure then have to try and support community groups that are on this platform.

And that's actually started to work quite well in terms of, because often when I talk to companies, they say, we don't know what communities want and we haven't got a lot of time to spend looking around at how we support things, which is why they end up working with big groups that don't necessarily reach the grassroots community groups.

So I think there's quite a bit of work that could be done around sort of joining things up and make everything a lot more collaborative and supportive.

Nicola Headlam

And Sara, we're talking about how the university, so as a researcher, how those multiple helixes can kind of work together across community, public sector. What would be the big

change that you would like to make so that you could be more high trust in general? Can you think of something that would be better from a researcher perspective?

Sara Jones

The University of Birmingham was recently renewed its civic commitment to the city that is meaningful. We do think of ourselves as a civically engaged university.

And I think the work that we've been doing, including Culture Forward, been an example of that. That's an initiative that's really grown substantially since 2023.

So we've been doing lots of work to try and reach out to the city to bring communities onto campus. Through our community day, we have things like a community engaged research codes of practice that we're working on. The public and community engagement team do an awful lot of work. And of course, City-REDI is also very engaged in the region and thinking about working with communities.

So I say that just to kind of lay the ground the way that there's a lot that we're doing, but I know in my work, speaking to community leaders and speaking to others outside of the academy, that there's still quite a lot of work to do to break down an impression of the university that it's closed and to break down an impression of the university and university research in particular, that university research is going to be purely extractive of communities that we're going to go in and I think someone said to me, but you're just going to kind of study us like under a microscope and I can completely understand why there's that resistance and of course there's historical reasons why people might feel like that as well.

So then that's the work that I think all individual researchers need to do and that I try to do and maybe don't always get everything right is to make sure that we are working with people as collaborators in an equal partnership who bring expertise based on their experience or their practice that sits alongside or can be joined in with our academic expertise but isn't in some way inferior to it. And that's one thing I think that kind of epistemic justice is really important.

But also the question of sustainability of community engaged research is really important. That's one thing that we've been thinking about with the myth busting projects is the way that academic research works and is funded is usually really short term or quite short term. So we only had essentially, I mean it was a bit and we only had six months to deliver the project. So now it's about thinking about how we can make sure then that the legacy of that project gets embedded and that we aren't just saying, well, here's the myth-busting

briefings, we've done our work and now that's it because we're no longer interested, we're no longer funded.

And I think that is one real challenge and it's a challenge for academics, but I think it's also a challenge for community-engaged practice across the board because so many projects are projects and they're project funded.

So in your kind of original question about, what would the perfect future look like, I think it is about that sustainable funding structures in order for people like Citizens UK leaders, like Citizens UK, Saeed and Minna, like Saathi House, to have that sustainable long-term funding to be able to continue to deliver the good work that they do to embed the practice in their communities and then to train people in the future to be able to deliver it as well, rather than constantly researchers and practitioners and everyone having to chase the next pot of money in order to be able to sustain what they're doing.

Angela Jeffery

I think it's also about making sure that the funders give equal recognition to communities as well as researchers because obviously the research can only apply within the funding rules and often the funding rules mean that you can only take community to or venue hire or some basic support rather than actually expertise.

Sara Jones

There was an interesting call recently by the AHRC called the Locally Owned Locking Culture for Inclusive Access, Lucia Fund, which we did apply for. And I think that was a really interesting model that I hope the councils continue to kind of use, which was where we could include non-HEI institutions or organisations as actually co-investigators or co-leads on the project.

So we had four on our application, which unfortunately wasn't successful, but we had four academic researchers but we also had like 5 leaders from within community organisations involved as equal co-leads on the project and I think that's really important and meaningful rather than... yes, this is an academic research project. And then we might bring you in occasionally as partners or maybe consultants, but you're not kind of equally designing, delivering the project. I think that's a really useful model.

Angela Jeffery

I think also it's about making sure that because communities spend years building up trust and getting their service users so that they've got a whole list of people that they can call on. So there needs to be some kind of recognition for that. Because if you just come in and then say, oh, we're just going to pay for room hire and not recognise that, then.

Saidul Haque Saeed

Very briefly, just very briefly, I think the relationship building from seeing, particularly the work you've been doing, Sara, with the large number of organisations and different backgrounds on the myth busting project, like you can definitely say that having worked with them, you know, for that period of time in 2025, there's a high level of trust, right?

And as a result, like going on to the next thing and kind of uncharting what's happening in 2026, you're in a better position to be able to do some more deep layered research. And, the stopping and starting kind of like affects that.

So, having done really good community engaged research, and I recognise your work too, Angela, you know, where now, and we're finding in another project, I work with Monder on another project, because we've been working on business support of organisations for some time. We're now able to do deep stuff about personal financial resilience, like things that people don't want to really talk about and what are the factors to what people are. So we're able to go deeper and if we could make it more sustainable with the same researchers, yes, from the same institutions, then we're able to chart, because things are changing at a very rapid pace at the moment in what's going on around the world, but what's going on within our city.

And those really well-built relationships are key to having people feel comfortable to say, well, I'm anxious about Birmingham having only a six month limit for local connection before you find a council for housing and maybe that limit should be increased without being called racist. Like these are the conversations we're able to have like deep, deep conversations with people because of researchers doing community research and build that initial trust.

Nicola Headlam

I'm thinking of an example of what's worked well. We've talked about, I say, obviously wanting to move away from projects, but more into relational, long-term matters. But just spotlighting on solutions, what are the characteristics of something that's worked well? And I'm thinking about... I'm still laughing about your right power on your essay and get it over the line, but was it about resource, was it about the people involved, political

commitment, having a longer time horizon, the profile of the work? What do you think? It might be, Sara, if I go to you first, on the work that you were talking about. What would you pull out as the main characteristics of the kind of change that you were able to make?

Sara Jones

I think in this space, change is really incremental, which is actually a challenge, of course, for university researchers who are asked almost instantly, as a project has finished, what has the impact been? I don't know yet. Give me a couple of years and I might find out.

What you can see, I think, is that incremental change. It sounds perhaps a little bit trivial, but it's not. Have meaningful conversations with people that they wouldn't have otherwise had meaningful conversations with and learn something about somebody else that makes them question other more harmful, toxic narratives that they're getting from the media or from their immediate environment.

And the things that I think I've seen through my work, but also, you know, I've just recently done some evaluation work for the city council as well and looking at the projects, some of the projects that they delivered through the Community Cohesion Fund. And what's really seemed to work there is projects that are meaningful for the people that participate and that can look really different.

One kind of common approach is there's this issue in our local area, like let's get together and talk about it and try and create a strategy together to fix it. Because the people, even if they don't have shared ethnicity or shared background or shared gender or any of those kind of identifications, they often identify with the area in which they live in.

So something where like, how can we improve the area in which we live in can have all sorts of other benefits beyond perhaps improving the area in which they live in, which is of course important.

I think one example from the myth-busting project, one of the most successful briefings that the team did was the one in Arc Victoria Academy where they organised a litter pick. So it was one of the things they did as part of the briefing was a local litter pick. So it was people coming together to make a kind of meaningful but small improvement to their local area. And other things are creative things as well, so where people come together to produce something creative that's for themselves, but in the process they end up with having deeper conversations.

For example, one of the projects that I looked at for the council was delivered by the Dialogue Society in Birmingham Progressive Synagogue, and all they did was take people from diverse backgrounds on a trip to the Frankfurt Christmas Market, but they paired them up for the day, and the kind of conversations they had just in that shared activity were meaningful in terms of promoting understanding across difference. As I say, it's these kind of small incremental changes, which is why it needs to be sustained activity.

Nicola Headlam

Angela, can you think of a spotlight on a solution? It might be slightly instrumental of me, but can you think of something, can you describe something that's worked particularly well?

Angela Jeffery

Everything that we do starts with listening, and so there isn't one size that fits all, so you absolutely have to go and listen to whatever the issue or the people that you're talking to, how they see things, and don't make assumptions, just listen and take it from there, because quite often people assume that it's Birmingham, we can do something for all the people in Birmingham and then we're absolutely not all the same. So I think that would be the first thing, making sure that any kind of project that we've, where there's been a project, try share back what you found.

So that really builds trust because people say, understand that you listened to them and then you actually did something about it and then you've told what the outcome was.

And then the sort of longevity. So basically having trust and so having Sisters UK leadership group where we kind of know each other, but then we can bring in other people from our organisations to then work on projects together. But they know at the heart of it that there is the sort of the long standing trust and the fact that we sort of pay into that as a member institution. So it's not based on, oh, we got a grant from somewhere. It's basically, we've all said that it's important to us to work together.

Nicola Headlam

So it sounds like quite a loose, tight network. Can you give me a solution, Saeed, of one of the things that you've worked on?

Saidul Haque Saeed

I think involving people throughout the journey of right from listening and we, some of the things we've been campaigning the last few years, you could perhaps kind of predicted them, but don't predict them. Like go back to the touring board.

So in a few weeks time on the 16th of April, we're going to have a pre-election assembly. And the story of that assembly started in February last year when we were in our Victoria Academy and we launched our listening campaign for three months. Like what are the stories? These are things we're working on. Are they still right? Do they still matter? Are they things like we're not thinking about?

And then coming back together and towards the end of April, like, you know, what have we heard that's different? But the interesting thing about listening is like you're listening to find the people who would want to do something about it.

We're so accustomed to people coming in and telling you what they think and you've got to go sort it out, right? That's been the kind of experience of lots of community listening for me in the past. Well, yeah, you care about it, but what is it you want to see happen and what will make a difference? And if we invested in you, and if we supported you, will you be willing to be part of what we call an action team?

So we have 3 action teams who were supported and trained between May, and then they've now come up with the agenda for what's going to happen on the 16th of April. So their own stories, but they're part of the research. They're part of like, you know, what does this mean? Learning things like what's the Freedom of Information Act request? Learning things like how does this work? And not just, you know, people like me who do it as a living, but actually people like me who do it as a living, accountable, someone who is in the front line, maybe as a teaching assistant or frontline as a community worker, or just someone who's in accommodation. So like involving people right from the get-go and right to when you win a deal or when you get a solution.

Even if there is a commitment to some of the things that we're asking from the politicians on 16th of April, you know, we're still committed for those people who help make those ask to be involved in making sure the delivery, you know, making sure that they have a say. And for me, that longevity, like people, I was talking about the other day, like 14 years, that's half of my working life with those folks. And why do I still have ants in my pants 14 years later? And it's because of the method of like, if you're accountable to people and you believe in those people, like everything else, like public policy might make you go mad, right? You've read some, I've done this in the 90s, like doing it again. But when you believe in those folks and you take them along, so much so. And that's why I credit the work that

Sara's been doing, which is we've allowed people to be in a certain level of depth in what they share about their lived experience compared to as a service user, to as a real kind of human being and see that represented in aspects of our work and being accountable.

Nicola Headlam

The ways of working that you describe, can you think of good international lessons that we could import or steal to improve our practice? Always looking magpie-like for good practice from elsewhere. I know that community organising has got deep roots in the States. Have you got American examples that you could rob for Birmingham?

Saidul Haque Saeed

Interestingly, hats off to the Brummies, we've got American colleagues who want to learn from Brummies. And we've had, you know, one of the most veteran organisers come along and do a lecture in Brum and hear about some of the stories at University of Birmingham at Newman University too.

And the interesting like connection to our colleagues, so we have a sister organisation in the United States called IAF, who've been involved in Saul Alinsky right from the beginning.

And what Sara and colleagues have been doing on this project, they're unpacking because things have changed, as you probably know, in the political dimension of the United States and finding ways of people to use dialogue and conversation to understand like they've all got housing problems and as opposed to labeling.

So there's some interesting conversations with colleagues in the United States about, you know, how do you organize broad-based when we're part of a society that's massively moving towards polarizing further and further. And so there's an interest about some of the things that we're doing with challenges right now to how it might be responded to. And

Sweden are quite interested in Brum's example. So there's a twinning conversation going on between Stockholm and Birmingham. So there's things to be learned, but there are things uniquely post-Brexit that are of interest to people in elsewhere in Europe, but also in North America.

Nicola Headlam

I mean, the Industrial Areas Foundation sort of models, I guess. It's very interesting in the UK example when when they do well and when they don't. So I'm a mile from the boundary of Gorton and Denton. So as you all know, we just had a particularly hard fought by-election here. And so interesting that the air war, as it were, the migration myth that you described, we're finding quite a lot of purchase in the algorithm, as you say, Saeed.

But when it really came to it in terms of mobilizing, getting the vote out to go one way or the other, the very divisive reform candidate actually, he managed to find 10,000 votes, but he didn't find anything more than that.

Whereas the Green candidate found an awful lot more, and it was because they'd done a really good ground campaign and clearly seizing control of the mechanisms of power and all the rest of it. But it is very fascinating, as you said, at this time, where it can feel very demoralising, some of the stuff that circulates. And then that's disembedded from place, whereas actually you can find quite a lot of reasons to be more hopeful the more you locate. And stories become kind of, they mobilize in one way and then they embed somewhere else.

Saidul Haque Saeed

It's important to learn about what we're learning about stories. So like Sara, like with your research, one that I know from the community organizations groups, that they know their people really well, right? They're from that community. But through the project, they felt like there was ways for them to have some of these conversations that they were previously weren't trying. Previously, it was down to the kind of connectivity to one particular person, as opposed to them having a group conversation.

So I know they know their people really well to enable them to use a tool to have some of these conversations was really, really helpful. So it was the power of the one-to-one conversation we said.

People ask us, how'd you get over 900 people in the University of Birmingham Great Hall? I said, well, it's definitely not from an e-mail mailing list. It's from those conversations. It's from the coffee mornings. It's from someone who says, and I would say to a lot of people, look, the 900 people don't know me or Tom, you know, or Mina. And so if it was an absolutely terrible event, they're not going to come and tell us off. They're going to tell you off because you're from the community, you know it.

Nicola Headlam

Don't waste my morning.

Saidul Haque Saeed

Yeah, it was not me. They're not coming because I'm famous or anybody else. It's because you've got those local relationships and the trip to the University of Birmingham for you is going to be about like what does it mean to be a Brummie and that kind of recognition, be if we kind of upset your caterers about bringing samosas in... but I shouldn't have said that on a podcast, but that's a wonderful way of like people feeling they belong, you know?

Nicola Headlam

I'll tell you what, I've always had good samosas in the university. Sara, international lessons, do you get out about much on the circuits?

Sara Jones

Yeah, it's an interesting question and I think. We're all going to answer it from our own perspective. And what occurred to me was actually a completely different project that I've been involved in, which was called Slow Memory, which was a European cost action led by my colleague and friend Jenny Wustenberg, who's at Nottingham Trent University.

And, I mean, it was a very kind of broad concept, but basically how do kind of slow-moving, non-kind of rupture-based events in the past kind of impact the present. And one of the wonderful things about the COST actions is that you have meetings all over Europe.

So we travelled, and I was in the core group as well, so we travelled quite a bit to learn about different approaches to dealing with the past, essentially dealing with historical conflict in different places, including Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Serbia.

I think some of the really amazing engaged projects that are being delivered there in really very challenging circumstances, and particularly in Kosovo, where the conflict is not over, but they're still trying to deliver engagement projects that bring together people across difference. I think there's quite a lot we could learn from those approaches in terms of how to have challenging conversations, or sometimes how not to have challenging conversations, but to have conversations that still bring people together so that they can find common ground whilst perhaps putting the real conflict to one side for the moment.

And then also the need for time, so what can be achieved in the Northern Irish conflict or context, post-conflict, is very different to what can be achieved or can be done in Kosovo at the moment. And I think although it's slightly abstracted from the kind of work that we're talking about, I think there is lots of learning that we could do from there.

Nicola Headlam

My first degree is the University of Bradford, so the peace studies, all that kind of conflict resolution thinking, it's just so much of a better framework, I think, for the soil of a place is affected by those conflicts.

And we will know very well a lot of diaspora communities in this country have experience of really those conflicts don't stay where they are, of course, because people move and their stories and their move as well.

Angela, can you think of an international lesson that we can steal in the good faith of Birmingham?

Angela Jeffery

So I've recently come across Community health navigators, which are basically something that's been happening in Brazil, but it's now being tested in the UK and it's been highlighted in the NHS 10-year plan.

And so the Community Care Collaborative in Birmingham have been looking at this and I know they're going to be testing out in the east and north and potentially other areas, which basically involves a local person being employed to go and knock on people's doors and just ask them if there's anything that's worrying them or challenging them. But then the important bit is that that person is linked in with the GP surgery and is linked into other support networks so that they can then actually help them and not just signpost them, but they actually work with them to make sure that whatever their issue is addressed.

And what we see often is people that have got issues with their housing or poverty or work or debt, they're so stressed that they can't then get a job because they're just so worried about the thing that the bottom of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid where they just need to get that support. And then after that, they can become a sort of happier and healthier person that can engage more in society and is sort of happier to get on with their neighbors because they don't feel they're happy with their life in general.

Nicola Headlam

That's really interesting health navigators. We have somebody in the LPIP Hub. Have you met Mark Swift yet? He's got a social prescribing social enterprise in the North West that's been going for a long time. And they do absolutely amazing stuff. And a lot of that connecting, that brokering, social prescribing, all that kind of malarkey, that social enterprise that works.

Nicola Headlam

So working on Nexus, Saeed is taking the fight to people that seek your votes. You've got people coming to the university to question people that want to be representatives. What else are you working on next, everybody?

Saidul Haque Saeed

Very briefly, we've been stationed in Birmingham for 13 years. We're spending time, as much as we can, with local leaders and a certain amount of my time is not going to be spent with the development of a potential Black Country Alliance, which is a different thing to Birmingham because the Black Country is not Birmingham, and what that looks like and how they want to shape broad-based organising for them.

But also we're in Citizens UK going a lot deeper with the different sectors that are part of our membership. So we already do a huge amount of work on with universities and civic agreements and we have a colleague who's an academic in residence and different faiths in particular. I'm going to be focusing a bit on Muslim civil society and their connections to and their interest in broad-based organising. So one of their concerns when as the kind of polarizing that we're having, people go back to their type, their world, or their tribe, for instance. And how does broad-based organizing appeal to more different parts of Muslim civil society?

So there's a lot of what we call strengthening of institutions going on. So majority of our work is really not campaigns. Everyone knows us for campaigns, another campaign, there's another fight, another thing. But a significant amount of work is like going deep within communities around like, what's your pipeline for developing leaders? Like, who are you listening to? And how are you building a relational culture your organisation as opposed to trying to be like the council and trying to be a bureaucracy when that's not how

you've been historically for at least the last 100 years for certain churches. You work a lot differently when you have a different culture.

So we spend a lot of time on institution development and really tracking the amazing people who step up to community leadership and like what's our investment in them and how we develop in their growth and not just winning amazing more campaigns.

Nicola Headlam

When you started talking, I was thinking of the brilliant Lenny Henry. Ah, the black country, it's country just for me.

Saidul Haque Saeed

Very, very amazing learning about [inaudible] history.

Before we even start talking about what are issues, there's a real regard for migration stories, but also stories of the place before we start thinking about issues. So that's where we are.

Nicola Headlam

Very interesting. Angela, what are you working on next?

Angela Jeffery

So through my LPIP Fellowship, we'll be having a roundtable to, because I've already done 25 interviews with doing a deep dive in Birmingham and then talking to other leaders in other parts of the UK from Citizens UK so that we can look at what's happening in Birmingham and then also what's happening in other parts of the UK and using that to make a toolkit.

So the toolkit would then be for government and other policymakers to help them, because we know that one size doesn't fit all, but giving them a toolkit so they can kind of pick and choose things that actually work for different communities and to give them a sort of blueprint of how to move forward. So that's the idea.

Nicola Headlam

Sara, what's next? I'm sorry you didn't get your Lucia bid.

Sara Jones

We got a good score, so that's one thing that's sort of on the back burner, but we were excited about it and all the people that we had involved in it were excited about it. So there is a real hope that we might be able to put that forward in some way.

But more concretely, the myth-busting toolkit is in train. We have an artist currently working on delivering some attractive downloadable tools, but also more broadly some kind of advice and guidance that we'll be able, people will be able to just kind of pick up and use in their own communities as part, as we've said, of that kind of sustainable.

I'm also still deeply involved in policy advocacy for displaced Ukrainians in the UK. I'm leading another project, which is the Ukraine Policy Network, which is being delivered between now and July, although I hope again that will embed and have some sustainability, but focused on pathways to settlement, education and skills, and mental health and well-being for displaced Ukrainians. And we're currently a network of about 80 NGOs, community organisations, practitioners and researchers exploring those topics and identifying what needs to happen.

I'm also, following on from the myth-busting project, have been working with some of the Citizens UK leaders who were involved in the project, particularly around Eastern European organising or organising for groups that represent Eastern Europeans in the UK, and thinking about how we can build solidarity and community work there.

And finally, I actually do have study leave next year, and my main plan for that is to write a book on relational practice, which in academia broadly, but particularly thinking also about that kind of relational practice that we've been talking about in engaged community, engaged research as well.

Nicola Headlam

Busy Bee. So with all the people that you know and all the things that you've done, you are really good brokers yourselves. But can you describe a really good broker? It doesn't need to be Richard Parker is a good broker because, God forbid, but can you think of the characteristics of really good brokerage that you've seen in action?

Saidul Haque Saeed

A very good relationally one-to-one.

Nicola Headlam

Good point. So the second question is to ask for a really good place leader. The idea being brokers, I guess, would share knowledge, so it would be maybe more on the university side, and it would be more like a Lego brick that you would need a broker to share new information, but then the leader would need to be more on the political side.

So a broker would need a good place leader, but clearly there's a lot of crossover in terms of what people can be leaders in different fields. But just thinking of somebody who's got that kind of connection head on, I guess.

Saidul Haque Saeed

I mean, I'm like sat with two of them, but like, basically, you can't just be good as the evidence in the studies. You've got to be able to connect what you're talking about to an audience, either a place leader like a politician or to a head teacher or to a charity trustee.

You've got to be able to explain what you're doing in a way that doesn't require them to go sit there, read the whole report.

And you've got to be able to say, like, imagine you're on Channel 4 News and you've got like, you know, 3 minutes to explain. They get you to do that in three minutes. Can you do that in a conversation?

And both Sara and Angela do that with bags of, and it'll be helpful, Sara, rooting for your study leave of relational practice. Because whatever it is that you're trying to broker, people want to know, A, do you believe in it yourself? And do... are you really listening to what my world is to what you're talking about?

And unfortunately, still, that's a difficult thing for a lot of people who are amazing to do. And there are examples in academia where we meet people and they say, look, you sound amazing and wonderful, but you're not thinking about the people. You're telling me so much stuff about clean air, but you're not trying to understand what people's experience of. Someone's trying to tell you, but you're not tapping into that.

Nicola Headlam

It's such a good point. Something like air quality, I mean, there have been campaigns, obviously, because that can be something that a community that lives around a road really can mobilise around. But you're right, like it's the science needs to be legible in order for it to feel like a point of leverage for there to be a campaign. That's a really good point.

And obviously, with so many challenges being environmental and being those kind of things, we need to be able to get people that can speak that really high science to be able to kind of...

Saidul Haque Saeed

Carl Stevenson, University of Birmingham geologist, I'm describing as the only community organising geologist I know. I go, this guy spends all his time talking to rocks, but he's amazing with human beings.

Nicola Headlam

You see, a good broker, community organisers and geologists love it. So Angela and Sara, we're taking for granted that you are really good brokers, but can you think of some other people who embody those brokerage functions in the way that they do their business?

Sara Jones

I'm going to give you a research answer. I hope that's okay? So the last book I published was on networks between organizations focused on memory of East Germany in Germany and the way that they networked internationally.

That doesn't really relate so much to community organising, but it got me really into relational sociology. And the kind of premise of relational sociology is that you are formed by your relationships and that you're part of a network.

And I think one of the things I really want to think through in this book that is mostly imaginary at the moment is how we can consider ourselves part of a relational net. As academics, as community organisers, as people within the community, as teachers and so on, we're part of that network. And the things that we do will shift our relationships with

other people, but then also shift the net in different ways as well. So whenever we kind of do actions, we need to think about how it's going to impact the relationships and the networks of which we're part.

Now that sounds like a slightly abstract answer, but to kind of bring it back down to the ground, that means that when you as an academic and thinking, OK, I'm doing this research. And you think, OK, but what is this for the community, for the network, for the relationships I'm part? And how can I make it meaningful for those people so that they can then use it for their particular position and that they can also use it within their networks and deliver it outwards?

But also, if I do this other action, what harm is that going to cause for that network of which I'm part? And making sure that you don't cause any harm in the actions that you do as well as that you think about the positives. Thinking about yourself as the product of the relationships that you're in can be really helpful in terms of thinking about how you might be a positive force in the networks of which you're part.

Nicola Headlam

It's really given me a strong flashback to delivering stuff around community planning. And the question was always, who is learning and changing as a result of these processes? Because if the answer isn't everyone, then you aren't doing it.

Sara Jones

Everyone, including you as well.

Nicola Headlam

Exactly. Your subjectivity doesn't sit outside under which you can go, let's organise a network and a process. If the learning and changing isn't for everybody, including yourself, then you aren't doing it right.

Angela, good brokers.

Angela Jeffery

So I was thinking, for me, it's really people who managed to put themselves in other people's shoes or even actually had experience in different types of organisations.

So I found it really interesting moving from a university to them working in community settings and working in the NHS because they all have different kind of power dynamics, different issues, which if you don't understand how that system works, then you just, you'll be asking for the wrong thing.

So it's just, I'd say I suppose from a brokering side of things, it's just trying to make sure that you have the emotional intelligence to understand where the other people's persons coming from and to try and really take the time to understand how the systems work so that you can kind of then influence within that system and not try and do something that's just never going to work. So you're really asking for it.

Nicola Headlam

You don't try and buy cauliflowers at the bakery.

Angela Jeffery

And try and ask for something that's actually winnable and deliverable.

Nicola Headlam

Exactly.

Saidul Haque Saeed

Got me thinking about cauliflower cake now...

Sara Jones

That's exactly where my mind went Saeed. I'm sure you could buy cauliflower.

Nicola Headlam

Yeah, I think that's about like, don't try and ask somebody for whom something is unavailable. You know, the transaction isn't going to work in that sense.

Okay, good place leaders. So obviously brokerage is an element of good place leadership, but there is something else about having the soul of a place or, God forbid, the actual mandate for it.

Do you think that the brokering that you've done has connected you with really good place leaders? And can you think about what that is? And maybe I'm wrong, maybe it's not a separate set of skills, maybe brokerage would be a core of being a good place leader.

But it sort of seemed meaningful for some reason to think about the two things as sort of slightly separate groups of people or crossing over different sort of positions within a network. Can you think of good place leaders?

Saidul Haque Saeed

Immediately comes to mind, a local councillor in Birmingham, Councillor Waseem Zaffar, who's passed away in January, he had a heart attack. But one of the reasons why he was a good place leader was he was really good at translating between the resident on the street to the organisations, groups, and businesses in his ward to the local authority and statutory agencies. So he was always advocating. If there was something they were doing, he was going to try and get it in his neighborhood.

And an example was last year, we identified an important need for what we call Operation Fearless Money, which is for a particular high street by the police. And we campaigned in Citizens UK, asked the police crime commissioner, could you include that in B19 where we've got community groups and so forth.

And he heard about that and straight away he stuck it in his work, in his meetings with the Police Crime Commissioner. And it's interesting, I had a conversation with the Deputy Police Crime Commissioner. He says, yes, Waseem was only the other day asking about this before he went away.

And so someone who is hot off about connecting the dots in between and interesting, the WhatsApp group from local residents are all filled with, if he was here, this would have happened differently. So he'd built relationships with the local depot for the bins and there was a really steady service.

So being able to identify exactly what you described, Angela, is like being able to put himself in the shoes of the NHS, who've got a big building, which is about 60% empty, apart from the GPs, and to other people to understand, like, what is it that I can get for this?

And the other thing that ended up was he made everybody connect to each other via place. Which although I had, as Sara will understand, people's experience of community doesn't necessarily have to be a postcode. It could be how they determine it.

But he was very successful at getting people to understand, well, I'm the local parish church and getting head teachers to come out on a Saturday was really interesting.

So it's the place leader in him which made organising for those of us who are in that area much easier because it was helpful to kind of think about roles when you were trying to fight for resources in that part of the city.

Nicola Headlam

Angela, a good place leader?

Angela Jeffery

I'm thinking that the difference is probably a leader then needs to, obviously, inspire the people from that place. But I also think they need to have a deep connection with the place. And so I think sometimes we see people coming from different parts of the world to lead big organisations that are place-based anchor institutions. And then they leave after a few years. And that then sort of leaves a sour taste in people's mouths.

So I think having place leaders that are actually from that place is really important, so that they understand from their childhood or their personal experiences as well as listening to other people in the ecosystem that they really have a deep understanding of what the issues are and a connection to be able to make sure that personally matters to them.

Nicola Headlam

Sara, good place leader?

Sara Jones

Yeah, I mean, I think I agree that some kind of authentic connection to the place, I mean, I'm not sure that necessarily has to be that you were born there, but I think that the connection has to feel authentic, that you care about the place and that it's meaningful to you and it's not a career move for you to be delivering the work.

I think in terms of the distinction that you're making, I think the category would be that all place leaders are brokers, but not all brokers are place leaders.

Nicola Headlam

Thank you.

Sara Jones

That it's possible to be a broker between different places, communities, organisations in a way that isn't that kind of authentic connection to place that you might have as a place leader. But I don't think you can be a great place leader if you're not also a good broker in the way that Saeed has described.

Nicola Headlam

That's going to be the bit that I advertise it with. It's a very good point.

Nicola Headlam

I realise I'm keeping you from your cauliflower cake or whatever, so I'm going to let you finish by having a wave of my place-based innovation magic wand. Be very careful with it. It has powerful magic but can grant a wish. You have absolute power to do one of these things or something else, but you must use your powers to make a tangible change to a specific place. Your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable and transferable. Smart magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to a 20% reducing multi-year budget settlement.

So you can have 10 million pounds. Half an hour with the cabinet and a slide deck, editorial control of the front page of a tabloid newspaper, a clause to insert into a bill, something, a message that goes viral on TikTok, anyone that would be an advocate for this work, and they'd have to show up for you for a long time, or the answer to something that's bothered you forever.

You can have other things, or you can have something else that is magic. But what do you think would do the most for you, Angela?

Angela Jeffery

I would go for long-term funding for community organisations, but think with universities so that they actually get the profile from some of the activities they've been doing and it's probably evaluated and you can see the proper impact so that it supports the whole of the ecosystem and you get genuinely inclusive growth.

Nicola Headlam

So it's written into universities' kind of contracts, everything.

Angela Jeffery

That would be wonderful, yeah. I think it's that collaboration so that there's long-term funding and it's sustained and they're working together, get proper impact and it's reported well so for everybody it's difficult and they've got genuine connection between different communities into the middle of the city so that people don't miss out on opportunity.

Nicola Headlam

Okay, so anyone going for promotion has to describe how they've spent up to half a day a week in the service of the community that they're in.

Angela Jeffery

Perhaps in a really meaningful way, not just, oh, [inaudible]

Nicola Headlam

I know we're so used to people that are just gamers and just immediately like, it's magic. No, I mean, in terms of actually turning their frame of reference and their co-producing their research questions and that's what I, yeah. So you think the answer is slightly university-based?

Sara, do you agree the answer is in the university or do you want one of these other things?

Sara Jones

First thing I'm going to say is I'm going to need more money. More money, yes, Ten million probably isn't going to do it, but I absolutely agree that kind of long-term funding for organisations, which needs to be kind of embedded in communities to deliver the work that they're already really good at doing, and also to make it sustainable so that they can train others to deliver the work that they're going to be doing, and that they can know that funding is there for the foreseeable future, so it's part of kind of service delivery.

And absolutely I agree that universities should be engaged and involved in ways that is equitable, as we discussed earlier, and meaningful.

But I also think, and one of the things that Saeed has been talking about in terms of that meaningfulness, like this is why I need more than 10 million because community engagement should not turn into a talking shop, that if there are things that the community identify need to be done, then there needs to be ways of delivering on that.

If they need better housing or they need better access to schools or all these problems that we know are there and are part of the cost of living crisis or the crisis in the way that funds are distributed, then there needs to be action on that. There needs to be a solution.

Otherwise, I don't think we're going to find it more difficult to get on with each other in unlivable environments. I think that's just normal.

Nicola Headlam

You could have inserted a 20 pounds 50 minimum wage.

Sara Jones

Okay, yeah, that would work. Although the money still needs to come back into the communities in order to improve housing, improve roads, improve schools, improve access to health care, all of those things that, you know, are challenging in the UK at the moment.

In terms of the media, I mean, to be honest, I find the media reporting actually across the political spectrum to be really challenging because it tends to be obviously be news chasing, sensationalised the story about the community coffee morning where everybody got on with each other and learned new things, probably isn't going to make the front page,

even though it's really meaningful in terms of that incremental change that we talked about.

I'm going to what I've written in my notes is neighbors meet for coffee and discuss how to improve local park. Doesn't really make for good headlines, but it doesn't mean that it's not a great thing to be doing.

And then obviously the racism that is just really prevalent in particularly our right-wing media and online is something that I would, if I only had a day, I would cut it off for a day, but I'd rather cut it off.

Nicola Headlam

I mean, if you'd have editorial control of the front of the Daily Mail with a big thing saying, we like it.

Sara Jones

Can I have editorial control forever? I think it's that.

Nicola Headlam

You're wrong about all these things would be a start.

Sara Jones

As a kind of originally a historian of 20th century Germany, I'll just leave that there. I think I'm not sure how to finish that sentence. I think the other thing I'd do is tear up the white paper on migration and start again from the principle that people don't leave their homes easily, from the principle that all humans have value and that value can't be determined by their economic contribution or by their income, and also that life sometimes goes wrong and that we as a humane society should be able to support people through those things. And that would look like a very different migration white paper if we started on those premises.

Nicola Headlam

Wowzers. Okay, right, come on, take us out on a song, Saeed. I'm feeling a bit sad about the history of 20th century Germany.

Nicola Headlam

You can take the money, by the way.

Saidul Haque Saeed

You know, I am, I'm going to take the money. So the 10 million pounds, definitely, and as colleagues have said, still ain't going to be enough. But like, there are these amazing people who are within universities, within communities, within schools, within churches, who have been stepping up with things collapsing around us, polarizing going and all the things challenging this crime and we need them and we need to find more of them and they're trying to deal with pastoral issues in the school, the roof in the church, to trying to pay the bills for their community centre, to run their advice surgery, to all of those and like those amazing people with the kind of everyday challenges.

Angela is a boss, boss, co-chair of Birmingham Citizens. There are loads of people we can go out and recruit and get involved in broad-based community organising, but there's a danger, it's like and the two organisers, can we cope?

And so there is a thing about, of course I'm going to say this, like we'll hire more community organisers, like focus more in depth and within communities rather than just a large area, and actually also use that money for community leaders to be able to strengthen their organizations and do stuff beyond just service delivery.

And so the thing I want to kind of end with is that there are these amazing people from different walks of life, also including public life within, you know, there are politicians and there are people who are officials. And it just feels like everyone is trying to fight burnout on a mission to do the most important stuff, which is defend democracy.

And so for me, I get to meet those amazing people. And I just wonder, like, how can we, if there was, there's more we can do. And there are things that are going on. There are people trying to help each other, people trying to help cover costs. And every time we do research, relational research, which covers meaningful costs for certain things, makes a big difference.

But the thing I want to end with is that 10 million pounds is to build hope through action of these amazing people who are already there. Like, they're not hidden. Like, they're not

moaning on Instagram and other places saying horrible stuff. They're there. They might be reading the horrible stuff, but they're there. I just feel like that's the world as it is that we seldom don't celebrate enough.

Nicola Headlam

So it's a step-up project under which you get to nominate people who have stepped up, and it's to do more more of what they were already doing and to see what heights you can all reach together. And you can cut that 10 million into as many.

Saidul Haque Saeed

They would quadruple that money.

Nicola Headlam

I'm actually feeling a bit sad. I actually don't have the cheque for you, Saeed.

Saidul Haque Saeed

I can see Elizabeth in, you know, EWA, we know Sara, like she's a force of nature. I can see her doing this amazing stuff in West Bromwich. I can see what Mina in Saathi House. I can see what Mohammed in his school turned that into. And we don't need to know, like we just give them the money, work with them and support them.

Nicola Headlam

I hear you. Well, it seems to me like the state of community organising in Birmingham is in good hands with this wonderful panel I've had this afternoon. Thank you so much for joining us.

We set out to mine insights from experts, that's the three of you, some real world case studies from on the ground in Birmingham, practical tips and career advice, and to spotlight solutions as well as to wave the place-based innovation magic wand. And we have, thank you.

Saidul Haque Saeed

Thank you.