



Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

COMMUNITY

Rochdale Council

Spooky Space – Rochdale Ghost Labs

The Rochdale Pioneers Museum hosted a couple of Ghost Labs as a continuation of the AHRC funded Social Haunting project working with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and Unite Community. One session was with a group of women from the Pakistani community in Rochdale, an existing group who have been accessing a variety of courses through the Workers' Education Authority (WEA). The other session was with a group of young people from Open Young Minds from Rochdale & District Mind, all of whom were either Young Advisors or volunteers.

At each of the sessions, Brenda and Geoff Heslop from Ribbon Road explained they were musicians who were aiming to create some original songs based on the ideas generated by the participants by listening to all of their stories and sharing the group's stories by making songs. Poet and Ghost Lab facilitator Andrew McMillan talked about how we all carry stories inside us and that's what makes us who we are today. Andrew highlighted how important it is to both think about, and write about, the past and the future. He compared it to going to the doctor, saying it's good for people to concentrate thoughts and to articulate the things they can't or don't often speak about.

Using the Ghost Lab tarot cards as a visual prompt, and in some ways a 'license to speak', Andrew encouraged the groups to talk about personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. Some of the discussion points that came up from these activities were that many of the women in the first group missed their homes and families back in Pakistan, as well as the sunshine, but also, they enjoyed everyday activities such as going to the park to have picnics with their children, and feeling proud of their achievements at work and at home. Thinking about the future, women from the first group wanted to develop themselves and earn more money to support their families by improving their skills such as sewing and gardening. The young people in the second group talked about their experiences of being bullied and their fears and worries. They also spoke about how their confidence and self-belief had been affected by past experiences. When thinking about the future, they were positive and hopeful for change, getting jobs, having a brighter future, being supported to achieve by friends and family, being patient and overcoming



People-centred councils
driving social innovation
putting people first

E: comms@councils.coop | T: [@CoopInnovation](https://www.coopinnovation.org/) | W: councils.coop

fears. As one of the young people commented, having drawn an image of a key and a lock “thinking you are the key to your future and if you decide to lock or unlock it, it’s your choice.”

As well as reflecting on their own lives, each of the different groups reflected on Rochdale, creating an image of Rochdale as it is now, but also envisaging a Rochdale they would like to see in the future. Andrew asked the groups what their ideas and thoughts of Rochdale were, as it is now, but also to express something about where it might go or where they might like it to go. At present, some of the participants felt that Rochdale could benefit from regeneration and development, and also touched upon recent events in Rochdale which have in some ways tarnished the image of the town, commenting that “Rochdale is forgotten unless something scandalous happens.” One young person commented that in some ways “you’ve got to break before you can mend and thinking about Rochdale and the reputation it has, perhaps we can start again.” However, people were keen to highlight that Rochdale definitely had many positives, such as its canal and buildings, new-build leisure centre and library as well as many different types of communities and shops.

Focussing on the future, both of the groups had many ideas for making Rochdale a better place, and were aware of the positive impact that regeneration funding could potentially bring to Rochdale to increase prosperity and job prospects, and also to prevent young people leaving the town to find jobs elsewhere, as one woman commented “Lots of children have degrees, but they move out of the city; Rochdale educates them, then we lose out!” People were also keen for there to be more parks and green spaces as well as better housing and transport.

The Ghost Lab sessions demonstrated how this approach to community engagement has the potential to draw out such interesting and varied responses, and how each participant is able to make personal connections to the words and images used to give expression to their own experience.

For further information contact:

Caroline Wolfenden

Head of Corporate Policy, Performance and Improvement – Rochdale Council

Caroline.Wolfenden@Rochdale.gov.uk | Tel: 01796 924 734



People-centred councils
driving social innovation
putting people first

E: comms@councils.coop | T: [@CoopInnovation](https://twitter.com/CoopInnovation) | W: councils.coop