

Community

Research

Initiative

Impact

Zine 2024



A short introduction to the Community Research Initiative

Our values

The Community Research Initiative is all about bringing people together, across the student-community divide. To do this we embody three key values; first, there are valid perspectives and ways of knowing besides academic knowledge; second, the highest quality knowledge and information is multi-perspective; and third, new knowledge should lead to positive social change. These underpinning ideas shape our work, as we strive to:

- Emphasise power sharing and knowledge democracy
- Act as a bridge between the university and the community
- Promote the creation of useful and useable products from student research

A Very brief history

The Community Research Initiative began in November 2018 because of cross-university interest in a “science shop” model of student engagement and a desire to create a more fulfilling experience for students’ dissertation work. Since the 2-year pilot, funding streams from the Office for Students in 2020, UCL’s Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund, and Students’ Union UCL have allowed our team and our mission to expand. We now include three full time members of staff who are continually working to expand our offers to create excellent opportunities for collaboration and social impact between our students and community organisations.





The explosion of student life and making more happen in the community!

At its core, the Community Research Initiative has sought to transform the traditional master's dissertation into a meaningful, collaborative experience that bridges the gap between academia and the wider community. With the advent of the Student Life and Make More Happen Strategies, we have experienced a wave of momentum that has driven our programme into exciting new territories. Our new directions have been driven to create experiences that **create a sense of community, enhance students' skills and wellbeing** and have a **meaningful social impact**.

Exciting new programmes

- Our **Pro Bono Research Consultancy Service** saw its first year of operation, offering 12 PhD students a unique opportunity to **sharpen their skills** in research consultancy and cross-sector collaboration.
- Our **Research Volunteering** offer was launched in summer. It includes a series of flexible and bite-sized projects that challenge students to **take their research and study skills from classroom to community** to make a tangible difference for local organisations.

Building up our core programmes

- We introduced a **Collaborative Dissertation Award** at the UCL Community Awards to **recognise members of our student community** who have excelled in creating impactful research partnerships.
- We expanded our **Power and Inclusion in East Communities** module to include 6 projects with East London based organisations. These projects not only enhance students' research skills but also **deepen their understanding of the diverse communities of London**.
- Our **commitment to student support** remains unwavering. We provide a supportive pastoral environment that **fosters a sense of belonging and well-being**, ensuring that students are fully supported as they navigate these challenging and rewarding experiences.

Project Highlight:

Reframing language to improve HIV Prevention

Maksida Sabackic's work with Positive East took on the urgent issue of low PrEP (Pre-exposure prophylaxis) uptake among Black African and Caribbean (BAC) women in the UK. Despite PrEP being available since 2017, many BAC women have not been accessing this life-changing HIV prevention tool. The project explored the deep-rooted communication barriers between these women and healthcare providers, highlighting how the language used in consultations often adds to the stigma instead of empowering women to take control of their sexual health.

Through this research, Maksida uncovered the powerful impact that words and consultation practices can have on whether BAC women feel safe and supported in choosing PrEP. These findings will be transformed into a community resource aimed at helping healthcare providers change the way they talk about PrEP, making these conversations more open, respectful, and effective. This work stands as a meaningful example of how collaboration and understanding can break down barriers and create real change, offering hope and better health outcomes for BAC women everywhere.



I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to partner with Positive East, which has enriched my understanding of local communities affected by HIV. Working with such a dedicated organization has been invaluable, and I highly recommend this experience to students aiming to make meaningful community impact."

Maksida Sabackic, MPH Master of Public Health 23-24





Project Highlight:

Exploring community on marine enhancement in the Scottish Highlands

Tomas Abdala Carrillo & Mossy Earth / Cromarty Seascap (client)

Tomas Abdala Carrillo's project with Mossy Earth and Cromarty Seascap tackled a pressing issue in the Black Isle of the Scottish Highlands, where traditional conservation efforts often reinforce land grabbing and elite land ownership. Cromarty Seascap offered a refreshing alternative—a community-led marine enhancement project that put local voices at the forefront. The project aimed to restore vital marine habitats while empowering the community to take an active role in conservation and ensure that data and evidence remained accessible to everyone.

To support this vision, Tomas designed a survey to gather local residents' input on the marine enhancement plans and conducted interviews with key community members. These efforts were aimed at understanding the community's expectations and ensuring that the project was rooted in successful governance principles. The feedback collected is set to guide the project's decision-making process and will be shared with participants to highlight their crucial role in shaping the future of their environment. This work embodies the spirit of true community-led conservation, where the people most affected by environmental changes are the ones leading the charge for a sustainable future.

“ Exploring the Scottish Highlands through the eyes of its residents was unforgettable. My key takeaway was reflecting on my role as a researcher in a community-led initiative, learning more than expected by connecting empathetically with locals and appreciating their bond with the land.”

Tomas Abdala Carrillo,
MSc Conservation 2023-24

Project Highlight:

Exploring Climate Change Education in UK Schools

Robin Heuermann & The Green Schools Project (client)

Robin Heuermann's collaboration with The Green Schools Project tackled a critical gap in UK education: the lack of comprehensive climate change coverage in the national curriculum. Recognizing that children growing up in a world increasingly affected by the climate crisis need more than just basic knowledge, The Green Schools Project developed their own climate change curriculum to empower the next generation with the tools and understanding necessary to face this global challenge.

Robin's research aimed to uncover the challenges and successes of implementing this innovative curriculum across several schools. By using a mixed-methods approach—combining teacher interviews, student focus groups, and surveys—Robin gathered specific feedback on the curriculum's effectiveness and broader insights into its impact on teaching and learning. Early findings highlighted the importance of practical, hands-on learning and revealed the need for greater accessibility for students with special educational needs and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. These insights will guide The Green Schools Project in refining their curriculum to better serve all students, ensuring that climate education is as inclusive and impactful as possible.



Conducting research through CRIS was the most rewarding part of my master's. After my previous dissertation, I wanted future research to have practical impact. Contributing to the Green Schools Project made the process meaningful, motivating me and fueling my excitement, regardless of the outcome."

Robin Heuermann, MSc Prosperity, People and Planet 2023-24





Project Highlight:

Perspectives on Regeneration in Hull Gardens

Will Hale & Rooted in Hull (client)

Will Hale's work with Rooted in Hull tackled the often-overlooked issue of how post-industrial cities are being regenerated in the UK. While top-down approaches to redevelopment typically focus on converting former industrial spaces into new functions like hotels, apartments, or green spaces, they often miss the deep and lingering effects of industrial decline on inner-city communities. Rooted in Hull, a community garden on a former dock site, offered an alternative—a grassroots initiative that reconnects people with their past and helps them imagine a more inclusive future.

Through this project, Will used photo-elicitation, where volunteers and staff at the garden captured images that reflected their personal experiences of the space. These photos were then showcased in an exhibition at the garden, bringing the community's stories to life. By spending time volunteering alongside the participants, Will gained deeper insights into how urban gardening can help Hull's residents connect with their industrial heritage and foster a sense of belonging and hope. The project aims to highlight the vital role that community gardens like Rooted in Hull can play in creating more inclusive narratives of change, offering a bottom-up approach to regeneration that truly resonates with those who live there.



Working with CRIS in Hull was an invaluable experience I will always treasure. The warmth and humility of my fellow researchers in the garden not only made the project more rewarding but also helped me develop skills and relationships that will benefit me in both my personal life and career."

Will Hale, MSc Environment, Politics and Society 2023-24

Research Volunteering:

Bite size projects that pack a punch

2024 saw the pilot of our new research volunteering programme. This sees student volunteers apply their research and study skills to short punchy projects that help organisations move their missions forward. Our pilot run of the programme saw 39 projects created with 31 students partnering.

Making Meaning of a Mountain of Data for Coaching for Unpaid Carers

The task: Coaching for Unpaid Carers needed support analysing four years worth of data on their coaching services for unpaid carers. As coaching is a new intervention for this group, they sought credible evidence to raise awareness and demonstrate the benefits and value to funders and commissioners.

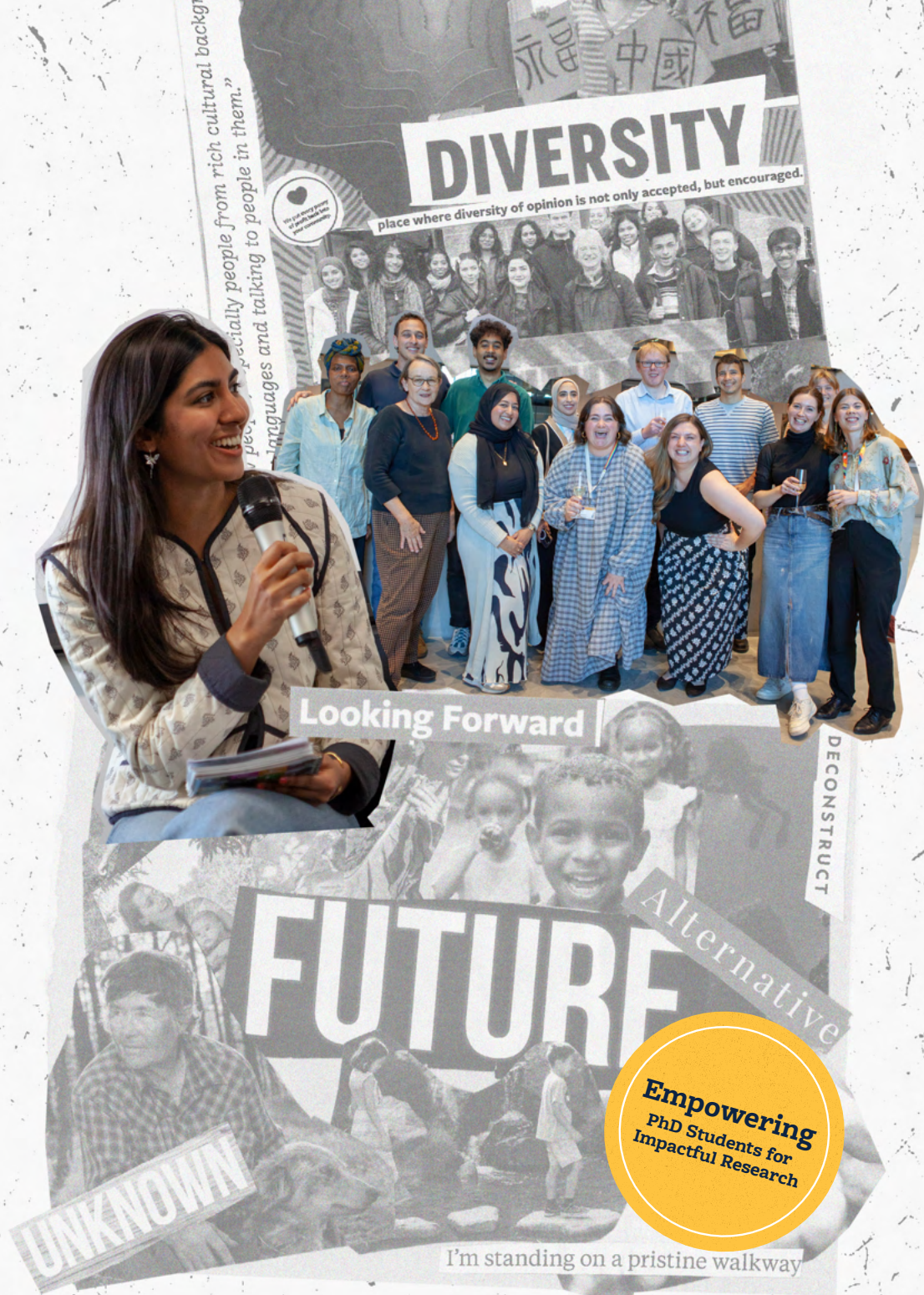
The Outcome: “Our volunteer, PhD student Jon Mella, created a single database for all our data. He then used our Theory of Change and evaluation framework to conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. For the first time we are now able to show credible evidence of improvements in key areas for participants which reinforce the value of coaching as a transformative tool for carers, offering hope and empowerment in challenging circumstances. This is essential for funding applications and reporting.”

Capturing Participant Voices at the Hackney Shed Slam

The task: The Hackney Shed Slam challenges its young participants to compete in a speaking competition. Hackney Shed was looking for our students to be on the ground at the event, gathering feedback and capturing the voices of attendees.

The Outcome: “Our volunteer Jordan joined us for the monologue competition finals to observe and write an article. He interviewed participants after their performances and prize announcements, following our planned questions. His interviews were well-handled, resulting in an excellent article that now helps promote the project and update funders.”





Skilling up Pro Bono Research Consultants for a better tomorrow

Our Pro Bono Research Service offers voluntary and community sector organisations a chance to benefit from the brains of our doctoral students to co-create solutions for their research, data, and evaluation needs. Our consultants offer specialised knowledge of research methodologies and leave organisations with a short punchy proposal that is then taken into action by our research volunteers.

Training Up: Research Consultancy Trainings

We hosted 40 PhD students at our November and January research consultancy trainings with Kohlrabi Consulting, a research consulting firm with UCL origins. Students grew in confidence and realised how they could apply their skills beyond the academic ‘ivory tower’:



The group activity created by Kohlrabi was insightful, making me realise that many problems in PhD research mirror those research consultants face. My confidence to interact with charities grew, and I co-created and visualised a research project with them. I am a research consultant!”

Dipa Begum, PhD Life Sciences

Putting Skills into Action: Our first Pro Bono cohort

We were delighted to onboard 12 students who had attended our trainings into our first ever Pro Bono Research Service. The students conducted consultancy meetings with a range of third sector organisations, as well as undertaking their own intensive evaluation projects on topics that aligned with their doctoral research.



It was important to me, as a researcher and anthropologist, to apply what I’ve learned in a manner that has immediate, tangible impact—channelling my experience and research toward an organization that can benefit from it. It’s fulfilling to use my research skills for something with quicker outcomes and more impact on local communities.”

Alice Riddell, PhD Digital Anthropology

Showcasing our Impact

The 2024 Community Research Initiative Showcase

The Community Research Initiative Showcase 2024 took place on September 11 at UCL East, a dynamic new campus embedded in community. Student, community and staff collaborators and newbies alike came together to reflect on the value of CRIS. The event included flash talks, panels, an exhibition of 2023-24 dissertation collaborations and a collaborative collaging activity which has fed into this zine.

Two panels focussed on the exciting new possibilities of research volunteering. An intimate talk between UCL PhD student Jonathan Mella and Catherine Macadam, director of Coaching for Unpaid Carers, highlighted the mutual benefits of knowledge exchange. The organisation gained a deeper understanding of how to effectively leverage their data, while Jon developed robust experience handling 'real-world' data. Cherrill Hutchinson took the mic next to share her experiences of working with UCL research volunteers. Cherrill is the founder of the Black Woman Kindness Initiative and a long-term CRIS partner. This year, student volunteers contributed towards BWKI's Voices in Harmony book through literature reviews and qualitative research. Cherrill, proud to be a repeat customer, emphasised the value of CRIS for bolstering and extending the work of grass-roots organisations like hers.

Three PhD students from our Pro Bono Research Consultancy Service, Hamda Kazim, Enrico Pfifer, and Alice Riddell discussed their motivations for joining the program and the insights they gained. Enrico valued connecting with stakeholders, while Hamda unlocked the practical application of her skills in addressing real-world issues. For Alice, the programme provided a career development opportunity with the UCL Trellis programme and a strategic partnership with the Power Project charity to enhance her research.

One of the standout moments of the event was the Student Dissertation Flash Talks, where we heard from an impressive lineup of six master's students. This segment not only highlighted the academic rigor of their projects but also illuminated the deep personal connections forged through collaborative research.

The students' passion for their subjects and dedication to their collaborators shone through, underscoring the immense value of experiential learning. Additionally, the students reflected on how the experience has shaped their professional journeys, from networking and skill-building to having a concrete project to share as they move forward in their careers.

Finally, all attendees were invited to participate in a collaborative zine making activity focussed on the power of community and of university-community collaboration. We were hoping for at least six collages to display in this zine, but our attendees outdid themselves. Although we couldn't include them all, you can find the entire gallery on the Impact section of our website.





Our 2023-24 Collaborative Dissertation Cohort

Anandh Krishnan Madasamy	Habitat International Coalition
Clarissa Salmon	Stop Rosebank community
Danielle Broadhurst	Afghan and Central Asian Association
Hannah Middle	The Mix
Jemima Gibbons	Surfers Against Sewage
Joshua Eaton	Safe Soulmates
Mah-Noor Ghani	Cities for Children
Morgan Love	Ben Raemers Foundation
Oona Miller	Citizens UK / South London Listens
Robin Heuermann	The Green Schools Project
Vivian Gounari	Community Teach Aid
Will Hale	Rooted in Hull
Laura Staes	Local Authority
Maksida Sabackic	Positive East
Jane Lee	Centre 151
Ting Kiat Ang (Gerald)	Ocean Regeneration Trust
Priyasha Sharma	One World Trust
Hannah Whitcombe	Local Authority
Laura Spagliardi	Heath Hands
Tomas Abdala Carrillo	Mossy Earth / Cromarty Seascape
Amy Li	National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces
Chia-Chien Wu	Centrepont
Mouhammed Yahyaa	The Mix
Cumbul Kerem	The Mix

Celebrating Our CRIS Community with Thanks

Our Community Organisations

An immense thank you to all of our organisation and community partners who have so generously given us their time, their honesty, their trust, and their intention. You have welcomed us into your spaces, into your communities, and into your missions. We are honoured to create with you and to explore all the different forms of knowledge that exist in our community with you. We are here with you and for you and will continue to work to be a bridge between the university and the wider world.

Molly McCabe

The current captain of CRIS (who is writing all of these thank yous!) I am grateful for the chance to lead and build this exciting initiative. To our students who have taken a chance on something different, who have dedicated their energy and their education to making the world a better place. To our organisations who are constantly teaching me so much and welcoming me with open arms. To our academic allies who are working to bring this way of working to the masses. Finally to my team who I would go absolutely insane without.

Anne Laybourne

The lovely Anne Laybourne. Mother of CRIS, reformed academic, and current lead of the Student Social Impact revolution at UCL. From Anne's brain comes CRIS' origins and from her continued support, mentorship, and innovation, comes its growth. It is a delight and an honour to create with her. This impact zine is a love letter to everything she has created and the ripples of impact that will continue to come from it!

Clarissa Salmon and Yasmin Jiang

The unparalleled coordinators who support all the work of CRIS. Their resilience, dedication, innovation, and quick thinking are the backbone of making CRIS happen. Their patience in working with Molly and ability to pick apart all of her ramblings is a beautiful skill that is much appreciated.

Martin Rocca Rodriguez and Aliza Kabani

Our very first student research consultants, whose brains and hands have worked to build out our Pro Bono Research and Research Volunteering offers. Their innovation, design thinking and killer Miro skills have taken ideas which only lived in Molly's head to reality. We are delighted to have Aliza for just a bit longer but will miss Martin as a key member of our squad!

Gemma Moore, Ruth Unstead Joss, and Evaluation Exchange

Gemma and Ruth are backbone of what makes CRIS, CRIS. Responsible for Anne's epiphany to leave research and take on the challenge of the Community Research Initiative, they live and breathe collaborative research! Ruth and Gemma have given their time, expertise, and advice generously from the very beginning as they continue to lead the way with the Evaluation Exchange programme for UCL's PhD and early-career researchers.

UCL East Engagement team

The UCL East Engagement Team has led the charge on making UCL East a truly engaged campus. Constant sharers of perspective, resources, and guidance, CRIS would not have the strength that we do in East London without them.

Kohlrabi Consulting

These UCL alums bring alive our research consultancy programme. Their ingenuity and genuine embodiment of the student experience has created a training programme that allows for our students to fuel our CRIS ecosystem. They have worked so diligently with us to create this amazing offer and we look forward to continuing to grow our partnership and collaboration!

Our darling Union Colleagues

Our designers, marketers, event coordinators, and systems thinkers (Anni, David, and Ella, Natalie, Phillipa and Guy, Annabel and Charlie, the ever patient Max). We lean on you often and we would be no where without you! Here's to cross team working to make us all better :)

What is this zine?

A zine (short for fan-zine) is a short publication typically used in music communities and activist spaces to share impact and messaging. Attendees of the Community Research Initiative Showcase 2024 were encouraged to create collages reflecting their experiences and insights from the event, capturing the diverse voices within our CRIS community. The collages from the event were collated into producing this Community Impact Zine.

The zine will serve as a tangible reminder of the connections made and the impact achieved through our collective efforts. As we continue to bridge the gap between academia and community, we look forward to fostering more collaborations that inspire, inform, and create lasting change.

Together, we can build a future where research not only advances knowledge but also empowers communities. Thank you to everyone who participated in our 2023-24 collaborations. Here's to the continued growth of the Community Research Initiative and the amazing work we'll accomplish together!

