

# Reflections from a Youth Co-Researcher Mapping the prominence of activism in Cornwall

 [boingboing.org.uk/youth-activism-cornwall-co-research](http://boingboing.org.uk/youth-activism-cornwall-co-research)

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By Joe Bulman

If you are thinking about getting involved in co-production work, this blog is for you. Here, I share my experiences about my first project as a youth co-researcher on the Nothing About Us Without Us (NAUWU) Project and introduce some of the resources we have created.

The Nothing About Us Without Us (NAUWU) project considers links between activism, identity and mental health. Young people in Cornwall, Blackpool and Newham have co-produced the research and all the activities. You can read more about it [here](#). In Cornwall, the NAUWU project focused on Activism in the Future and included a number of workshops in schools around climate solutions. The G7/Y7 was coming to Cornwall, and it was a real opportunity for young people's voices to create positive change, building their resilience in the process.

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I was connected to the NAUWU project through Cornwall Council. After getting in contact with them in the pursuit of a Kickstart scheme, I found out about the NAUWU co-researcher role. I have always had an interest in activism and the ways it can be an

empowering source for good. Up until then, I had only explored this interest through short-lived protests or small changes I could make in my daily life. I found the role of 'Youth Co-Researcher' aligned more strongly with the types of skills I wanted to be learning. These included presentation skills, workshopping and working with young people. I knew immediately that this was an opportunity to practice a whole new set of skills. I was motivated to learn how to run workshops especially as it fit with my career goals in the arts/gallery sector.

The process happened quickly. Once the first few emails were sent, I soon found myself in the midst of the project planning process. I was instantly considered vital to the success of the workshops by my co-workers, Hannah Tallis and Mirika Flegg. Initially, I was worried I might not have much to offer to team, but I quickly learnt that my insights and skills were hugely respected as a key member of the group. Although I originally thought this was just a way to gain professional experience, I soon learnt that I had the opportunity to push myself in all aspects of workshop management and had been granted rich insights into how these workshops develop and present themselves differently again and again. I quickly learned that my perspective as a young person was also hugely valuable because I could relate strongly to the young people and had a good idea of what they would want from a workshop.

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See also:



### **Nothing about us without us: civic activism as a mental health intervention**

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When planning the workshops, we learnt so much from bouncing off of one another and sharing our knowledge as individuals. It really helped to have a team with a variety of talents and I believe this dynamic made a more cohesive presentation that the young people would respond too with greater success. I remember being encouraged to critique and produce what we would present, and how it would look. This formed an approach that not only sought to include famous activists that we all would know, but local activists too, as we wanted to push this idea that activism can develop anywhere. I believe understanding that parents and teachers can be activists helps too, because young people look up to them on such subjects. By the end of the workshops, young people had identified school staff that they felt made a big difference in their community.

After listening to what some of the young people had to say, we also found that including a diverse example of activists is also wise, as we are trying to represent a whole spectrum of people. This is to hammer home the idea that activism is open to all who

strive to make a change for good, not just celebrities/famous people or those that have additional privileges because of class or race. In addition, I found that at the beginning of the workshops a few of the young people thought they didn't know enough about activism or mental health in order to truly participate. After a few slides and activities in our presentation however, these young people were actively discussing and commenting on why they thought activism was vital in local communities. This change in self-belief was a true theme of the workshops, and one I empathised with as I discovered how to present slides of my own, which is not something I have ever done before this project. I doubted my ability to even host such workshops, but through practice sessions, previews of the presentation slides and an open mind, I soon felt comfortable enough to take on a slide or two.

As a group, we produced two videos reflecting on our experiences of some of the activities that worked really well. These activities may help train other young people to do this sort of work. You can watch these videos here and use them in your own work:

### **Tools for Change: Root Cause Tree Tool**

A short train-the-trainer video introducing an activity that can help young people think of ways to solve complex problems in their community.



## ACTIVISM IN THE FUTURE

Tools for Change: Root Cause Tree Tool

Nothing About Us Without Us



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/XH8l5vTsY7A>

### **Tools for Change: Elm Tree Story**

A short train-the-trainer video introducing an activity to help people think about how we are all connected, and the value of different people coming together to solve problems.

## Aims of this video...

- Introduce you to the Elm Tree Story and the Activist of the Future Activity
- Discuss how they can be used as problem solving tools
  - Independently / Groups
  - In-person / Online / Blended Learning
- Share our 'Top Tips' for facilitating a session using these tools



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/YxuzHEfSyo8>



The NAUWU project gave young people the opportunity to share their ideas around climate solutions with global leaders via the G7/Y7. Most took up this opportunity. I can see the workshops having an absolute influence for how these young people consider activism for their future. Many saw themselves and people they knew as activists by the end of the sessions and I think it improves mental health to know you are not alone in trying to make the world better.

After we completed the workshops, I realised I had developed a range of transferrable talents of my own. Not only has this experience allowed me the chance to enact workshops with young people, but it has also developed my own knowledge about the environment, mental health, and what it can mean to be an activist as an individual.

Personally, I have developed a range of diverse skills including problem solving the nuances of critiquing work you hope to present. In addition, I have hosted online workshops to a class of 20+ young people, which is another thing I have never had the opportunity to do before.

These skills in developing workshops, as well as a newfound knowledge regarding mental health and the environment, are key lessons I hope to take forward into my future career. I am now in full time employment, and I currently work for the Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange in Penzance as a 'Gallery Assistant.' I have always wanted to run my own arts workshops and the NAUWU project gave me an opportunity to learn the skills I need to do them in the future. I would strongly urge other young people to get involved with the work Cornwall Council, Boing Boing and University of Brighton produce. This process is enriching, and you will leave the sessions equipped with a whole new set of skills, that can be applied to any future career. As a co-researcher, you will be granted stewardship of a transformative project from beginning to end, work closely with a team of academics and have the chance to do things you never thought you could do. It is a flexible arrangement and one that can really enhance professional and personal development. If you have the time and resources, there is a wealth of experience that can be gained.

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