

Reaching hidden communities

*The Sound Agents has gained a reputation for working with hidden and hard-to-reach communities in Liverpool. **Moira Kenny** describes two projects.*

The Sound Agents designs and delivers project-based work from concept to evaluation, building national and international partnerships. Director John J. Campbell's style is to develop arts projects in the same way as a group produces an album. The organisation has recently released 'singles' of audio-visual histories of people affected by migration in Chinatown, the oldest community in Europe, and Everton, a deprived area of Liverpool.

The 'Everton Project' is an experiment in co-production working with Dr Simon Abrams and his patients at the The Great Homer Street Surgery. The initial plan was to teach patients how to make a short film, record their memories of the area and document the surgery's move to a new building, and give them transferable skills. Very quickly it became evident that the information being captured could be used to plan the new user-friendly surgery. The film includes interviews with Dr Abrams telling of his mission to involve patients in the delivery of their own healthcare and interviews with other health professionals, architects, developers and residents. The film questions mental health and well-being, relationships with patients and the physical and emotional barriers we experience in the waiting room. Patients James and Alan have recorded their memories of dust that covered the area years ago and how people wanted compensation for their curtains and the foul smells that caused everyone in the area to have a sore throat for weeks. The film is to be shown in the surgery's waiting room.

A second project, 'Project Chinatown', is a number of projects planned for a period of five years leading to the development of a new multimedia Chinese Cultural Museum and International Research Centre in Liverpool. An exhibition of Martin Parr's 1984 Chinatown photographs took place in the Black-E, a contemporary arts and community centre. The images, portraying teachers and pupils in the Wah Sing Chinese community centre, a hairdressing salon, a chip shop and a Chinese family in their living room, were viewed by over 2,500 people during the Chinese New Year celebrations in January.

Then with funding we produced a newspaper entitled 'Some basic facts about Chinatown' (6,000 copies) which documented the lives of everyday people. It was printed in English and included a photographic essay detailing the bustling Chinatown of London in comparison to a deserted semi-derelict Chinatown of Liverpool. Volunteers distributed the newspaper gaining access to an audience of over 20,000 visitors to Chinatown. We used social media as a marketing tool to update progress, give exhibition dates and send out a PDF version of the newspaper.

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