

Community welfare in second-hand

Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series



Illustration by Efa Blossie-Mason

Violet Broadhead, University of Bristol
Alida Payson, Cardiff University

Rhiannon Craft, Cardiff University
Maya Wassell Smith, Cardiff University

Community welfare in Second-hand – Workshop Report 4

Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series

Workshop 4 — 20th May 2022

The second-hand challenges workshop series brought together researchers and practitioners working in second-hand to problem-solve together around key challenges in the second-hand economy: waste and reuse, repair, labour, and community welfare.

1. Introduction – Why this challenge?

This workshop explores the tensions around community formation and everyday community welfare in second-hand spaces. Research shows charity shops, like libraries, can operate as community ‘junction boxes’ connecting people in need (Anderson et al. 2015, p. 19); important nodes of cultural and economic participation (Ayres 2019; Edwards and Gibson 2017); and sites of relationship, where ‘compassion’ and ‘care’ help people cope with life transitions (Flores 2014). At the same time, pressures and frictions beset past and present community welfare issues in second-hand spaces. Present economic and social conditions put strains on these community spaces and people. The pandemic, rising inequality and poverty, and state welfare cuts mean people often show up with serious needs, health problems, and other vulnerabilities, which second-hand spaces are not necessarily able to respond to.

From our own experiences researching and participating in repair cafés, sewing meet-ups, local designer’s studios, charity shops, and men’s sheds, we talk about how people actually use second-hand spaces. Critical scholarship explores the limits and paradoxes of community in second-hand, demonstrating the historical trajectory of how second-hand spaces have fostered community, especially for marginalised people, as well as how second-hand institutions have used and framed second-hand work as welfare. Our speakers also sketch out examples of good practice: people, projects and organisations committed to the affordances of second-hand contexts for community connection, repair, and even reparative politics. Finally, the discussion and design sprint activity begins to frame out how second-hand spaces can continue to be - or else become - open, accessible community resources for people to come together, build relationships, and source what they need.

2. Defining the challenge - Programme of speakers

- **Dr Alida Payson**, Cardiff University

Alida started off by talking about research examining charity shops in a time of

Second-hand Challenges Workshops

austerity. She argued that while charity shops might seem to be mostly about shopping, they are actually important sites of everyday welfare and governance (Nickel 2016) on which people actually rely to get by. She explored how charity shops need to be understood as part hospital, part Jobcentre, part foodbank of things, and even part prison.

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/people/view/1013919->

- **Dr George Gosling**, University of Wolverhampton

George brought historical context to the question of community welfare and second-hand institutions, looking at The Salvation Army's salvage and waste paper operations. His presentation, 'Second-hand as job creation and salvation in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain' showed warehouses piled with waste materials picked over, baled and transported by poor workers. He outlined how the charity used and framed the blistering labour in their salvage warehouses and operations as moral salvation. He has a book forthcoming on the history of charity shops.

<https://researchers.wlv.ac.uk/gcgosling/about>

- **Elle Gray**, Trainee Clinical Associate Psychologist with NHS Solent

Elle talked about her work with Social Prescribing, DEFINE and how connection, community and volunteering (in second-hand spaces!) links with health. She shared an example from one charity shop on Hayling Island that came together during the pandemic to respond to urgent community needs. She explored ongoing questions about how the important wellbeing work happening through social prescribing is (not) resourced, and how critical safeguarding and bureaucracy questions persist around social prescribing in second-hand in practice.

- **Rose Sinclair**, textile artist, curator, and University of Goldsmiths

Rose shared her research into post-war Black British women's sewing and textile craft groups, called Dorcas Societies. She talked about how Black women who had settled in the UK from the Caribbean women used Dorcas Societies, held in their front rooms, to find refuge from both the violent racism of Windrush Britain and their exclusion from white and masculine church spaces. From circles of stitching, Sinclair showed how Black women built powerful communities of mutual aid and activism.

<https://www.gold.ac.uk/news/rose-sinclair---dorcas-societies/>

Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- **Dr Delyth Edwards**, University of Leeds

Delyth talked about her research into everyday cultural participation and 'the cultural economy of charity shops'. She offered examples of how people living in a diverse but very deprived area of Manchester relied on and used one particular charity shop. She explored how people used the shop in important and unexpected ways, as a library, for example, taking and exchanging books with no exchange of money, and as an affordable access point for consumption. But she pointed out that these roles were in contradiction with the retail charitable function of the shop, to earn revenue for the parent charity.

<https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/education/staff/1656/dr-delyth-edwards>

- **Claire Wellesley-Smith**, Artist, writer and researcher

Claire talked with us about her work linking community making, textile arts and health. She outlined one particular project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, about the history and present of a former textile manufacturing town. In one example, a participant used patchwork to cover over a large name-brand and thereby transform a hooded sweatshirt; in another, participants collected the scraps and castoff threads from stitching workshops to fill an 'economy quilt' made from transparent organza. One of her key points was the way so much of this work relies on deep, long relationships formed over years and even decades, and yet is funded only briefly, through structures that insist on new projects with new objectives, rather than the sustainment of these communities.

<http://www.clairewellesleysmith.co.uk/>

Two presenters were not able to attend due to illness, but we still wanted to highlight their work: Cardiff-based designer **Haifa Shamsan**, of Maysmode, designs upcycled garments that bring together Welsh and Yemeni cultures, building modest fashion communities online and off. Sisters **Sarah Valentin** and **Julia Harris**, of Dati, have been working for more than a decade to connect and care for communities of stitchers and makers (most recently at The Sustainable Studio), and making one-off zero waste pieces, such as their new 'rubbish jumpers'!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-36018304>

https://www.youtube.com/c/HAIFAKS/videos?app=desktop&view=0&sort=d&shelf_id=0

<https://www.daticlothing.co.uk/>

3. Themes in the discussion

- **Connections between charitable and governmental institutions with power over people's everyday lives**

Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- The Salvation Army – history and present.
- Connections with second-hand and charity, welfare state, police, prison systems.
- Experiences of harm and stigma undercut trust in outsiders and institutions.

- **Community, mutual aid, refuge, healing, and sustainment**
 - Refuge from racism and persecution.
 - Mutual aid and care.
 - Common threads among Black British women immigrants to the UK in Dorcas Societies in the 1960s, New Travellers, or people suffering from (often inequality-inflicted) ill health.
 - For Travellers, centuries of being rejected, harassed and hounded is hard to heal; but community healing is really important.

- **Grassroots activism and politics**
 - Communities come together to stitch/repair/remake and discover political issues in common.
 - Open space to get organised and advocate for change.
 - Local and small change, and big and systemic change.

- **Histories and connections to the present**
 - Histories of charities, the NHS and public health, social welfare (e.g., social prescription of radiators on the NHS!)
 - Histories of migration, racism, and colonialism (eg, racism against Windrush generation).
 - Histories of class, poverty, and economic marginalisation.
 - Scrap dealing and salvage as valuable, traditional practice.

- **Resourcing is an ongoing problem**
 - How could these spaces be ‘sustainable’ economically?
 - Workshops for artist space.

- **Where should we locate responsibility for the welfare of our communities?**
 - Why are these spaces being asked to serve so many needs?
 - What are the correct locations for this kind of social care and work? For example, are charity shops equipped to support the welfare needs of volunteers and customers?

- **Importance of community well-being**
 - Value beyond money.
 - Examples in New Zealand, in Greek oikonomia/ economy (management of the household) focussed on the well being of those in the “household”.

- **Importance of hand work (vs machines)**
 - The ‘hand’, important for immigrant communities.
 - Hand-stitching and repair as a way to build community.

- **Charity shops/second-hand and work/employment**
 - Work experience and a stepping stone into work.
 - Or a more fulfilling form of retail?

4. Ideas responding to the challenge... How might we strengthen community and everyday welfare provision in second-hand spaces?

- **Changing public attitudes and understanding**
 - Reduce stigma around second-hand.
- **Building skills**
 - Give people skills, not just services.
 - Mending circles, workshops, cafés, equipment.
- **Infrastructure and policy**
 - More collaboration between councils, CICs, charity shops, etc.
 - Keeping THINGS local, in local circulation.
 - Address digital poverty, technophobia, access to energy.
 - See below: cost of living, affordable housing, work week, money to live on.
 - Unions for second-hand workers (charity shop, Etsy resellers, etc).
- **Linking**
 - Linking charity shops with repair facilities (to build social culture with opportunities for upskilling).
 - Mapping charity shops, mapping Dorcas Societies – visualising and storytelling about what's there.
 - Linking up organisations (eg, charity shops, councils, CICs, community groups (Dorcas Societies).
 - Linking school curriculum based on community participation.
- **Creativity, connection and play**
 - Encourage artistic exploration and expression!
 - Charity shop socials after hours: snacks and drinks after closing.
 - Travelling swap/mending club.
- **Time**
 - A day a week (four day work week!)
 - More time for this work through lower living costs, affordable housing.

Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- **Space**

Physical space

- Used under-used, disused, abandoned spaces.
- Places for practitioners to share.
- Multi-use, flexible community space HUB of like-minded community groups, open at different times for different groups. Drop in, events, mending circles, photo space (for socials, e-markets) workspace, demos.
- Using existing space, after hours (charity shops).
- Traveling mending/swap (library vans) to bring the space to you!

Online space

- 'Second-hand drinks' w/rotated/curated speakers/events, funded/in kind resources.
- Global networks/maps of projects and communities.
- Online 'how to' set up groups, do skills/activities.

- **Funding**

- More free spaces for community groups to use.
- Funding for community outreach roles in charity shops.
- More funding from government for these activities.

- **Asking critical questions:**

- Practical steps for being critical about what is and should be part of the 'community welfare' side of work in a charity shop.
- What is the role of research?
- What questions do we need to ask next, and what do we need to know?

References:

- Anderson, S., Brownlie, J. and Milne, E.-J. 2015. *Between Kith and Kin and Formal Services: Everyday help and support in the 'middle layer'*. York: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation. ISBN 978 1 90958 698 7
Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/between-kith-and-kin-and-formal-services> [Accessed 20 November 2022].
- Ayres, J. L. 2019. The Work of Shopping: Resellers and the Informal Economy at the Goodwill Bins. *Business History* 61: 122-154.
- Edwards, D. and Gibson, L. 2017. Counting the pennies: the cultural economy of charity shopping. *Cultural Trends* 26(1), 70-79. DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2017.1275131
- Flores, R. 2014. From personal troubles to public compassion: charity shop volunteering as a practice of care. *The Sociological Review* 62, 383–399 DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12118
- Russell, C. and Knight, J. 2022. *The Connected Community: Discovering the Health, Wealth, and Power of Neighborhoods*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. ISBN 978-1523002528