



## Rural Durham Community Research Network

### **Did you know communities have more opportunities than ever before to influence change and lead research?**

Research is a process of investigating a problem or specific question to identify new knowledge and develop new ideas.

Traditionally, research is designed and delivered by academics, with a focus on theory and discoveries. Sometimes academic research doesn't always consider the needs of local communities, which leaves individuals feeling research is being 'done to them and not with them.'

However, community-led research is being increasingly recognised as an alternative way to prioritise local needs. Community-led research empowers local communities to design and deliver their own research, leading to more impactful and relevant research findings.

Durham Community Action is working in partnership with the Rural Design Centre and Durham University to deliver the Rural Durham Community Research Network. The network brings together VCSE organisations, researchers, and policy makers with an interest in community-led research that reflects the unique needs, voices, and priorities of rural Durham.

The network is part of a national 'Community Research Network Programme,' a new, ground-breaking collaboration funded by UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), which supports nine networks over five years to drive diverse, locally led research across the UK.

The network supports people in rural communities across Weardale, Teesdale, and Derwent Valley to take the lead in researching the issues that matter most to their communities.

Throughout 2025, [communities have engaged](#) with a range of workshops and training sessions delivered by the network, helping them build skills and confidence in research.

As a result, [four VCSE organisations](#) have gone on to receive funding to deliver research in their communities. Over the coming weeks and months, community researchers will explore issues identified locally as significant to daily life: the role of heritage and the arts in strengthening connections, transport barriers for young people, the impact of volunteer companionship, and how shared community spaces support rural

We're now at an exciting time as we begin to see the emergence of these research projects happening in County Durham.

If you're interested in learning more about community-led research, join us for our first network meeting, which offers an opportunity to connect, find out more, and to share ideas.

Find out more: [Rural Durham Community Research Network Meeting](#)