An Applied Social Research Report

for

KUC

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

"What impact has KUC had on its clients?"

Yvette Lewis

May 2009

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

School of Sociology & Social Policy

interchange

Learning through Service

Charity No 1038129

Image provided by KUC

"What impact has KUC had on its clients?"

CONTENTS

3 Acknowledgements

4 Executive Summary

6 Introduction

7 Background to the Project

12 Social Exclusion and Resistance in Kirkby

21 Research and Findings
21 •Initial contact
24 •Engaging with KUC
27 •Support from advisors
30 •Benefits from visiting KUC
34 •Anything that KUC can improve? Any further comments?

37 Conclusion and Recommendations

40 Appendices

41 Research Methods
41 •Sample
42 •Making the research happen
43 •Table 1: Interview Schedule
45 •Interviews
45 •Ethics and the British Sociological Association
46 •Observation
47 •Disadvantages of Qualitative Research
47 •Thematic Analysis

48 Introductory Letter (from myself and KUC)
49 Interview Schedule
55 Information Sheet
60 Consent Form
62 Bibliography

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my utmost thanks to Dave, my research supervisor, for all of his guidance and support during this project. Also thanks to Louise, for her help throughout.

I would also like to thank the staff at KUC, especially the Business Advice team, who assisted me with the research, contacting clients and setting up the interviews etc.

I would like to thank the people who kindly participated in this research and thank them for giving up their time in this way. I have really enjoyed meeting them all.

Finally, I would like to thank Sharon and Barbara from Interchange.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research has clearly identified the social impact that the Kirkby Unemployed Centre (KUC) has had on its clients. This has been achieved by interviewing respondents who have recently benefited from visiting one of the following KUC sections;

•*Learning Centre to take up free training and accredited courses.*

•*The Employment and Skills section, to access career, employment, training or education advice.*

•*The Business Advice section for financial, marketing and/or business advice.*

Respondents spoke of their positive first impressions when they visited KUC. They expressed a very high regard for their friendly, approachable, professional advisors. The strong, continued support that they received from KUC and their advisors was identified as excellent.

The many benefits of visiting KUC were highlighted, and include, clients starting up their own businesses, one is already established, two are in the process of starting up. Some people expressed how they had greater opportunities for employment after visiting KUC. This may be because they now had new or improved CV's, they had started further education courses, and they were re-training or had embarked on voluntary work. Some clients had received financial support with training courses, which they would never have been able to afford. One client had learnt a completely new skill, using a computer for the first time. Many spoke of increased confidence and self-esteem, and a positive outlook on future career prospects.

There were very few recommendations. One client suggested a wider range of leisure classes. No one could identify anything that would improve KUC's service, but some stated that strong, locally driven publicity would raise awareness, and encourage more people to access the organisation. Some clients considered that this publicity would be

useful to reach people already in employment, who may not consider KUC's services to be relevant. Respondents were so impressed and enthusiastic with the support they received from KUC and their advisors that they were keen for other people to hear about it.

INTRODUCTION

What impact has KUC had on its clients?"

This research evaluates the social impact that visiting the Kirkby Unemployed Centre (KUC) has had on the people who have used the Learning Centre, Employment and Skills and the Business Advice sections of the organisation. This information provides evidence for KUC's 2009 Social Audit. The research aims to find out what the respondents' involvement with KUC had been. The study also investigates how this involvement had benefited them, and whether this has had any implications for the wider community in general, using telephone and semi-structured interviews with former and present KUC clients.

The research project and Interchange

Interchange, a registered charity, has played an integral role in this research. Interchange work in partnership with Merseyside universities, and with local community groups and voluntary sector organisations. It is often the case that voluntary organisations require research, in order to apply for funding for example. The partnership, therefore, benefits both the organisation and the student, who can have the research assessed as part of his or her degree.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

KUC's mission statement is as follows:

> *"To promote and support the social and economic well-being of local people, by providing opportunities and resources to achieve a better quality of life for all"* (KUC 2007).

KUC, like other Unemployment Workers Centres (UWCs) in the UK, developed from a conference, held in 1980, aimed at combating Britain's growing unemployment crisis (Forrester and Ward 1986). UWCs were established to support the most socially excluded people by providing training benefit advice and support (TUC 2009). Initially the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) funded the majority of centres, but local authorities now provide funding for many. In 1986 in the UK, there were more than two hundred Unemployment Workers Centres, (Forrester and Ward 1986), and twenty-three years on, that number has fallen to fifty-eight (TUC 2009). In the 1980s, reduced funding by the MSC resulted in the closure of many centres. A national appeal for funding by trade union leaders soon afterwards was largely unsuccessful, except for the Liverpool centre, which benefited from generous support by Merseyside trade union members (Forrester and Ward 1986). Today, various groups contribute to KUC's funding for instance Connexions, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Learndirect and Jobcentre Plus. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Huyton New Deal in the Community and LEA Knowsley are just some of the many organisations that contribute to KUC's success (KUC 2007).

KUC, based in Westhead Avenue in Northwood, Kirkby, was the first organisation of its type in Merseyside, and was established in 1981 by local unemployed residents and trade union members. As well as initiating UWCs, the 1980 TUC conference organised the National March for Jobs, from Liverpool to London a year later. KUC is one of the longest running centres, (KUC 2007). It plays an important role in

the community, providing a place of contact that may be less intimidating than official establishments. Its longevity demonstrates a confidence that local residents have in the organisation (Meegan 1989). KUC has campaigned on behalf of both unemployed and employed local residents since its inception (Meegan 1990). At first, Knowsley Local Authority funded KUC, however, because of voluntary sector cutbacks, over the years, it has suffered a reduction in support from the local authority (Meegan 1989).

Due to new funding initiatives, KUC has recently expanded, increasing its staff, and range of support services. KUC provide their service predominately for Knowsley residents, although a small percentage of clients receive debt advice from a base in Tuebrook. KUC also provide redundancy advice within businesses (KUC 2007).

There are four main sections of KUC that clients can access:

Employment and Skills

This department was recently awarded the Matrix Quality Standard for their successful service. In order to offer as wide a service as possible, the Employment and Skills team also operate from premises situated in Kirkby town centre. Advice on jobs, training, and support with constructing CV's or filling out application forms is always available, and weekly surgeries take place in Jobcentreplus premises. Clients can also access training grants through this department if required, which has helped many people re-train successfully. More than 36 per cent of their clients gained employment after consultation with this department. Statistics from December 2006 and May 2007 show that of the 446 clients that accessed their service, 150 of them found full time work, 45 went onto training courses, and 14 found part-time work. The Employment and Skills team work closely with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Knowsley Works Plus (KUC 2007).

Business Advice

The Business Advice Team can help with business plans and ideas, accounts and funding and grant queries. They work closely with Jobcentreplus and the Prince's Trust. KUC (2007) reported that from 2007 to 2008, the team were instrumental in establishing 220 new jobs, and supporting 176 new businesses. This section operates also from the Kirkby town centre premises, as well as KUC's other sites in Huyton and Halewood. The team also engage in lobbying local government to provide a fairer system for residents who may have difficulty in establishing bank accounts due to a poor credit history. Many previous clients have since received various enterprise awards, testament to the success of the team,

The Learning Centre

The Learning Centre offers free, flexible training to suit all levels and abilities. They provide support with basic reading and writing from entry level to level two. The Learning Centre run City and Guild 'supporting learners' and adult teaching courses and also a management course. Various computer courses are also available, such as CLAIT and ECDL. Free childcare is available for clients should they need it (KUC 2007).

The Community Law Centre

The Community Law Centre can assist clients who need free, independent welfare or debt advice; or support with court appearances. This team currently hold a Legal Services Commission Specialist Quality Mark (KUC 2007).

Many of KUC's clients are from 'hard to reach' sections of society, for instance single parents or people who have been unemployed for a long time. KUC's client base is wide and varied, and may consist of people in receipt of sickness benefits; people with disabilities, older people or people from minority ethnic backgrounds (KUC 2007). In order to ensure its services are accessible to as many people as possible, KUC operates from a number of outreach centres; in Halewood, Huyton and Kirkby town centre. The shop in Kirkby centre works in partnership with Kirkby Credit Union. It works on a 'drop in' basis, and is staffed by two guidance officers. The majority of KUC's clients use the centre in Westhead Avenue; 13 per cent visit the outreach centre in Kirby town, 9 per cent use their facility in Huyton and 2 per cent access the Halewood centre. KUC offer a flexible service, working closely with trade unions to enable shift workers to access their training courses. The demand for the services that KUC provides may be evidenced from the large numbers of clients that accessed the centre. From December 2006 to May 2007, nearly 4,000 clients used its facilities (KUC 2007).

KUC work with a multitude of organisations, for example Local Solutions, the Princes Trust, Knowsley Community College, Merseyside and Cheshire Network of Unemployment Centres, Local Credit Unions, Train 2000 and the Department of Work and Pensions (KUC Social Audit 2007). These partnerships are very important as they enable KUC's services to be as widely publicised as possible. KUC also rely upon positive comments from former clients to help increase its marketing potential, by means of 'word of mouth'.

KUC have campaigned alongside other organisations on matters of social justice; including the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, the Knowsley Anti-BNP group, End Child Poverty and Greenpeace (KUC 2008). KUC have played an integral part in establishing prominent forums in the Knowsley area; Knowsley Jobs, Education and Training, Knowsley CBED Forum and Knowsley Advice Forum and Debt on our Doorstep (DOOD) (KUC 2008).

Many of Liverpool's residents were living in slums in the inter-war period, and the area's housing was seen as the most deprived in England (Esher 1981). One of the first efforts to rectify Liverpool's housing crisis was the creation of a 'new town' in Speke for 20,000 residents. After the devastation of the Second World War, slum clearance began in earnest. Runcorn, Skelmersdale and Kirkby, built on an army ordnance site were established (Pickett and Boulton 1974).

Kirkby was divided between three local authorities, City, District and County. This division soon led to disorganised and inadequate services and facilities (Pickett and Boulton 1974). As Kirkby was being established, Lancashire had been the planning authority, providing the majority of services, but Liverpool was keen to keep Kirkby within it's boundaries. Differences arose between the two authorities; Liverpool Corporation failed to develop adequate social welfare policies, which eventually contributed to Kirkby's problems (Pickett and Boulton 1974). In 1972, Kirkby became part of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (Chapple 1975).

When Kirkby was first established, businesses from Liverpool City centre relocated there attracted by the low cost premises. However, many closed or moved out of the area (Meegan 1989). Merseyside was declared an 'Unemployment Area' in 1946, (Lister 1983:160) receiving administrative support to promote job growth. Then, in 1949, Merseyside became a 'Development Area' ensuring government loans, grants, and financial support for the building of factories in the locality (Lister 1983:161). This was designed to encourage businesses to move away from the overcrowded south and Midlands. Extra land acquired in the early 1950s, ensured the establishment of firms such as Kraft, Fisher Bendix, Birds Eye, Otis Elevators and AC Sparx Plug (a subsidiary of General Motors) resulting in the employment of 16,000 local people (Meegan 1989). Other national and multi-national companies followed such as

Albright and Wilson, Kodak and BICC, as well as a car components factory in the early 1960s. These benefited once again from regional policy incentives, and provided more work for local residents. Women in particular benefited from this employment boom, often being the first generation of families to be in full time work (Meegan 1989).

However, the increased industrialisation on Merseyside caused more environmental pollution to the region. Workers in the area suffered disproportionately from industry related illnesses. Much of this related to asbestos, imported through Liverpool's docks and used extensively in Merseyside's car and ship industries (Tombs 2005). Increased manufacturing in Kirkby has also resulted in hazardous chemicals polluting the area. Sonae, a chipboard manufacturing company, was established in the region thanks to generous support from the government and Knowsley Borough Council. Dust, from the plant, has caused ill effects on up to forty per cent of the areas population (Knowsley Against Toxic Sonae Campaign in Tombs and Whyte 2004). Due to the high incidences of accidents and explosions, the Health and Safety Executive have investigated this company, however, it was the Environment Agency that eventually brought the firm to court. Sonae were fined £40,000, just a tiny percentage of their annual profit (Tombs and Whyte 2004).

Between 1952 and 1965, 50,000 people were re-housed in Kirkby, the majority (92 per cent) of these were owned by Liverpool Corporation (Lister 1989) many of them were flats, (Esher 1981). Most of Kirkby's residents had previously lived in Liverpool, since this was one of the pre-requisites of obtaining accommodation there (Pickett and Boulton 1974). Often, neighbours and friends were separated in the relocation, causing the breakdown of established communities (Meegan 1989). In the 1960's, the population was relatively young, many were families with young children and half of them were under fifteen years of age (Pickett and Boulton 1974).

Since the 1960's, Kirkby has been on the receiving end of negative media publicity, particularly in the press. In the 1950s, the Parish

Council from Kirkby's surrounding rural area complained that the influx of Liverpool residents would cause the lowering of property prices (Meegan 1989). A 1964 article from the Sunday People newspaper, entitled 'Mob Town' outlined Kirkby's lack of social facilities and high levels of vandalism and crime (Chapple 1975: 25). Kirkby's image was further damaged by the decision to film the 1960s BBC police and crime drama 'Z Cars' there (Chapple, 1975, Meegan 1989). However, in 1975, complaints to the BBC resulted in the organisation removing any links with the town (Chapple 1975:27). In 1965, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool publicly criticised the continued negative portrayal of Kirkby in many British television documentaries. Today, much of Kirkby's crime rate is in decline (Meegan 1989); murders and sexual crimes remain at a low level in comparison to other parts of the country.

In 1970, Kirkby was the UK's largest estate, with 150 businesses employing 22,000 people (Lister 1983). However, this boom proved to be short-lived. The 1970s saw unemployment and inflation rise. Britain suffered a pronounced economic crisis, along with a rise in industrial conflicts (Sullivan 1994); affecting Liverpool's once thriving docks. Jobs here declined by as much as 75 per cent (Meegan 1990).

By 1971, nearly three quarters of Kirkby's jobs were in manufacturing; the majority of these businesses were UK and foreign multi-national corporations (Meegan 1989). As Britain's economy worsened, subsidies to many failing industries began to cease resulting in the closure of factories and plants. Ninety per cent of all Kirkby's redundancies were job losses from multi-national corporations (Meegan 1989). Therefore, the knock-on effect for areas like Kirkby, heavily reliant on these businesses, was more profound than most other regions. These losses affected women more than they affected men. Nationally there had been a 33 per cent decrease in employment in the 1970's. In Kirkby, that figure rose to 53 per cent for men, and 62 per cent for women (Meegan 1989). The national economic downturn continued into the 1980's and this had a marked affect on the regions economy (Meegan 1990).

Kirkby has also suffered problems with its housing stock over the decades. Between them, Liverpool and Knowsley have the largest number of social housing in England (Meegan 1990). Much of Kirkby's housing problems have stemmed from the fact that many of the 1960s newly built dwellings were too small, were not sound proofed, were frequently vandalised and essential repairs were slow to be carried out (Chappel 1975). To exacerbate the situation, a 1975 report found that flats in Kirkby were nearly three times as expensive as similar flats in Liverpool (Chappel 1975).

The Conservative Government introduced the Housing Finance Act in 1972, aimed at increasing private and local authority rents, an increase, which would eventually phase out council housing subsidies (Hilditch 2005). Across Britain, hundreds of thousands of people, mainly from outside London, protested against these increases, receiving little press attention, possibly because they tended to be small tenants' groups (Sklair 1975). There were two protest groups in Kirkby; the Kirkby Unfair Rents Co-ordinating Committee which consisted of residents from the Southdene, Westvale and Northwood areas. There were also the Kirkby Council Tenants, who were from the Tower Hill estate; being one of the longest lasting in England, continuing for more than twelve months (Sklair 1975).

After withholding rent payments, the tenants ignored subsequent orders to appear before court. Eviction notices were given; tenants reacted to these by blocking the main routes out of the estate during rush hour (Sklair 1975). Some strikers received notice for contempt of court, and one being incarcerated for a fortnight, causing further protests (Hilditch 2005). The imprisonment of seven tenants led to the eventual abandonment of the strike when an agreement to pay off arrears was reached. The protests had caused workers at the Birds Eye factory in Kirkby to stop work in sympathy for a day. A number of these were sacked for protesting, but picketing by local residents forced the firm to reinstate these workers (Hilditch 2005). The tenants' movement in Kirkby would eventually prove to be a great influence on further campaigns against unemployment in the

region (Meegan 1990). Continued demonstrations across the rest of Britain resulted in the Act eventually being abandoned in 1974 by the incoming Labour Government (Hilditch 2005).

The election of a Conservative Government in 1979 heralded a change in state intervention, cuts in public spending, the introduction of a 'market economy' style welfare state, and the abandonment of 'Beveridge' style welfare policies. State provision of welfare services was perceived by this new government as costly and hindering the country's growth (Sullivan 1994). This eventually led to a reduction in the role of social services, with more emphasis being placed on the voluntary sector to provide essential services, and social services acting as support. This led, in effect, to a return of pre-welfare state provision. The government also lowered income tax, but doubled indirect taxation causing a reduction in spending, all eventually resulting in higher unemployment (Sullivan 1994).

Increased automation in manufacturing, and low levels of investment resulted in Knowsley's predominantly manual workers suffering more than most, with little opportunity to re-train. The region had the lowest percentage of professionals and managers in the UK, as well as a relatively small proportion of self-employed enterprises (Meegan 1990). However, these statistics generated little sympathy from the government. Speaking of MP Robert Kilroy-Smith's Knowsley North constituents, the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher concluded,

"…the trouble with your constituents is that they're not self-starters are they?…They've got no get-up-and-go." (Margaret Thatcher 1985; cited in Meegan, 1990: 91), clearly demonstrating the distinct lack of empathy that the government had for Knowsley constituents.

Unemployment in Knowsley continued to grow, and in the 1980s, was three times higher than the rest of the UK (Meegan 1990). In total, between 1971 and 1996 there had been a 53 per cent fall in Liverpool's employment, far greater than in any other UK cities (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004). The restructuring of local jobs caused an increase in people

who were out of work for a long time (Meegan 1989). Firms who remained in Kirkby offered fewer jobs, and many of those that remained were part time posts. Kirkby had four times as many long-term unemployed as the rest of Britain, affecting young people in particular, many of them having little chance of gaining any employment (Meegan 1989). This increased deprivation in the region; living standards within the authority were the worst in the UK, according to the 1981 census (Meegan 1990). In 1986, seventy seven per cent of Kirkby's children were in receipt of free school meals; and a 1988 survey found that as many as eighty one per cent of residents received Housing Benefit (Meegan 1989). Knowsley also had to contend with a declining population, in the 1980s people were leaving Merseyside faster than any other county (Meegan 1990), Liverpool alone had lost 40 per cent of it's population since 1961 (Couch 2003). Due to the decline of its port, and industry closures, by the late 1980's, Liverpool was almost at the bottom of a European economic performance league table (Cheshire 1990 cited in Jones and Wilks Heeg 2004).

Such was the increasing economic decline in the area, that in 1996 Liverpool's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had dropped to 90 per cent of it's 1981 level (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004). According to the governments' Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, fifteen of the poorest wards in England were to be found in Merseyside. Six in Liverpool, and three in Knowsley, this despite the fact that the region has qualified for more government policy initiatives and regeneration funding than any other part of the UK (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2005).

Jones and Wilks Heeg (2004) argued that from the late 1990's, Liverpool's economy has slowly shown signs of growth; from 1995 to 1999, employment grew by more than ten per cent. There has been more private sector investment and increases in tourism. However, the majority of this has been in the city centre, an area that has received large amounts of regeneration funding due to Liverpool's successful bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2008. The promotion of business expansion, rather than the depravation found in Merseyside's outlying estates has been the priority of Liverpool Council. Kirkby, in

particular, has yet to feel the benefit of this extra income and investment (Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004).

Today, Kirkby's residents still suffer from prolonged deprivation, with little signs of it reducing.
In 2007, unemployment in Knowsley stood at nearly eight per cent, in England it was five and a half per cent. However, as of January 2009, that figure for England has increased to 6.5 per cent, the largest rise since 1997 (National Statistics online, undated).

Government statistics for 2006 show the disparity in benefit claimants in Northwood, Knowsley and England (National Statistics online, undated).

	Northwood	Knowsley	England
• Any Key Working Age Benefit	43%	27%	14%
• Jobseeker's Allowance	6%	4%	2%
• Incapacity Benefits	24%	14%	7%

(Please note: Incapacity Benefit is payable to people with any long-term illness)

At every level, people who live in Northwood are more likely to be in receipt of government benefits, often three or four times more likely then the rest of the population of England.

Between 1998 and 2001, the gap between affluent and less affluent areas grew more pronounced than ever (National Statistics online, undated).

In Knowsley, there are high concentrations of 'worklessness', which describes people of working age who are either, unemployed and seeking work, or are unable to work due to ill health (Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) 2004: 4). Areas may suffer high levels of worklessness because of different factors, industries may have closed or restructured, thereby reducing the number of available jobs. Residents may have difficulty of finding work outside the region because of public transport issues, or area discrimination by employers.

In areas suffering high levels of worklessness, statistics from the ODPM (2004) demonstrate that only four out of ten residents are in work, the majority of which are part-time, or low paid jobs. People from these areas are less likely to have any qualifications, and low hopes of getting employment. Half of all households have a family member with a long-term illness (ODPM 2004).

People living in areas of high worklessness are more likely to be living in social housing (ODPM 2004). Almost a third of Kirkby's residents live in this type of housing, compared to just under nine per cent in England (National Statistics online, undated). In 2003, 65 per cent of households in social housing did not have a family member in employment (ODPM 2004).

More than ever, there is a tremendous need for social and economic investment and reconstruction in Kirkby (Meegan 1989). Regeneration, which, Knowsley Council hopes, may be a new football stadium for Everton FC and superstore for Tesco, both, proposed for Kirkby in the near future. Councillors argue that their installation will bring much needed employment, investment and confidence to the area (Downs 2008).

There is, however, a strong sense of community in Kirkby, in spite of all the hardship that has been endured (Meegan 1989). Although nationally, there appears to be a growing divide between people in jobs, and those that are unemployed, this is not apparent in Kirkby, possibly because many working people here have family or friends who are unemployed. Meegan (1989) considered the resourcefulness of Kirkby's residents with various schemes in place to combat unemployment. Adult classes are taking place in schools to provide education for the long-term unemployed. Single mothers manage a popular Kirkby housing co-operative, with plans for supporting elderly residents in the pipeline. One of the most important projects in combating unemployment and uniting communities, was the establishment of Unemployed Workers Centres, bringing us back to KUC, "the most active and firmly based centre" (Meegan 1989: 229).

Approximately 500 people each week access the organisation, proving that the necessity for KUC's services is as strong today as it was in 1981. KUC support local people by providing a wide range of support services, information and advice on jobs, training and education. KUC influences regional, national and international policies to support social justice; it also promotes financial inclusion with debt and benefit advice, and by campaigning on clients' behalf (KUC 2007).

During interviews, respondents were all keen to make their views on KUC heard. One in particular told me she was keen to come to the interview to help KUC because they had done so much for her. She wanted to *"…give back a little, 'cos of all the things they've given me"* (Respondent 1). Another respondent told me she wanted to help because of how '*brilliant*' her advisor was. They were all very positive about the organisation, and the service they had received, and some expressed a desire to return the favour.

Initial Contact

This section of the report looked at the respondents' initial contact with KUC, how they found out about the organisation, what their first impressions where, and what they knew about KUC.

The respondents were asked how they first heard of KUC. A couple said that their friends had recommended the organisation. Although nearly half had heard about it from the Job Centre, one respondent maintained that he had frequently visited the Job Centre, but they had never told him about KUC. The rest found out about the organisation from advertising, either from pamphlets delivered to local residents, the Yellow Pages, or the local newspaper '*The Challenger*'.

When respondents were asked what their first impressions of KUC were all of the views where overwhelmingly positive. One respondent observed that it looked like a school, which it was in the past. Some stated that they were surprised how big it was when they went inside the building. A couple said they felt nervous when they first arrived,

"…obviously, you're a bit apprehensive when you first come here, but once I met…(advisor)*, he made me relax"* (Respondent 6).

One respondent thought the nervousness he felt was because he viewed KUC as a place similar to the Job Centre, but after a few minutes realised:
"…it's nothing like the Job Centre, the people here are completely different" (Respondent 6) a point also observed by Meegan (1989) who outlined KUC's value in providing a place of contact which users may find less intimidating than official establishments.

None of the respondents had ever been to an organisation like KUC before, but they stated that the friendliness of the staff soon made them feel at ease. Some expressed surprise on their first visit, as they had no idea that the place existed, even though they were residents in the area. One person said that its location may have been the reason why she was unaware of it; the building is situated next to a school, and is 'set back', away from the road.

When respondents were asked what they knew about KUC before they came, all were unaware of all of the different services that KUC provided. Some respondents knew that it provided courses, one person stated that he had attended union meetings there. A majority of respondents did not know anything about KUC, but some thought that was because they did not need it since they were employed or retired,
"…that's why I never bothered, I didn't know they ran courses." (Respondent 5).

Half of all respondents thought KUC was exclusively for unemployed people, in order to help them get back to work, or to provide benefit advice. Respondent 1 summed up these viewpoints,

"I thought it was just for benefit advice –'Unemployed Centre', sounds like it doesn't it? But I'm not on benefits, I didn't think it was for me."

One respondent thought it was an "employment exchange", because of the name. Most knew of the 'outreach' KUC branch in Kirkby town centre, but did not know that the building in Westhead Avenue had any connections to it. One person said he had passed the town centre building every day when he went to work, but did not know what the

organisation was. Of those that knew of the KUC building in the town centre, all agreed that the Westhead Avenue premises looked more inviting, but this could have been because most of them had never visited the town centre branch.

Although not everyone had been fully aware of KUC before they accessed its services, all were impressed with the organisation and the staff after their first visit:

"…everyone was very friendly" (Respondent 3), *"Very organised, I think it's great*" (Respondent 4), views that summed up the general opinions.

Engaging with KUC

This section of the report will explore the reasons why respondents consulted with their particular section of KUC, Employment and Skills, the Learning Centre or the Business Advice section.

The respondents were asked how they came to be in that section of KUC. The question also wanted to ascertain whether any respondents had used any other sections of KUC previously.

This question was answered fairly quickly, none had originally intended to use the services of any other section. All of them had just visited the relevant section for career advice, business advice, or just for the courses on offer. Some replied that they initially rang KUC for advice, and did not know which department would deal with their query. After an initial consultation, they were directed to the particular department that would be the most suitable to them.

Respondents were then asked why they went to their particular section of KUC. The answers varied, half of them came for career advice, in the Employment and Skills section to *"heighten my prospects for employment"* (Respondent 3). This was necessary mainly because of redundancies experienced by those clients, although one respondent found it necessary to find part-time work due to family commitments. Three people needed help with compiling CV's, something they had never had to produce before. Previously, they had always found work from friends, by 'word of mouth' or from within their workplace. They stated that now, finding work is a completely new experience, and they found it necessary to seek career advice, as they had been unsuccessful up to this point. One respondent stated that recruitment procedure in the firm that he had previously worked in, had changed, and he was forced to re-apply for a job that he had done since leaving school, with the same employers. This was the reason why he needed advice on writing a CV.

"heighten my prospects for employment"

Two respondents informed me that they were re-training, or on a course, so that they could work in another section of the same industry *"…to fill in gaps for employment, you need it now."* (Respondent 3). This would give them greater flexibility when applying for jobs. Although they had not yet found employment, and some were still training, all felt that their chances of finding work would be greatly enhanced because of the professional advice given. Knowsley already suffers higher than average unemployment, across the country; unemployment in general is rising (see section 'Social exclusion and resistance in Kirkby'). These respondents and others in a similar position reported facing great difficulties adapting to these enforced changes in the current climate.

Three respondents had set up, or were in the process of establishing their own business, and were receiving guidance from the Business Advice section. All three had previously been made redundant. One, when he was facing redundancy, had attended a seminar by the Business Advice team, after receiving a leaflet about KUC. He found this extremely encouraging and sought advice from the team soon afterwards. He stated that his recently established business is doing well, and he is optimistic for the future.

One respondent, who is retired, came to KUC specifically to learn how to use a computer. He was given a computer by a relative, without having any idea how to use it. He has recently completed a computer course within the Learning Centre. He stated that he would like to attend some of the other courses available. Having left school aged thirteen he felt that he had missed part of his education.

After visiting the centre, most respondents stated that they were more aware than before, of the other services that KUC provides. A number of respondents agreed that they would definitely seek another section of KUC for advice, should they need to in future.

"I haven't needed to go to any other part… but I know that...(advisor) *would signpost me."* (Respondent 1).

After asking everyone about their particular sections and the reasons for visiting them, the next part of the research aimed to find out what people thought of the support they were given.

Support from advisors

This part of the report will analyse data on the support that each respondent received from their advisors. In each section of KUC, clients rely on staff members for guidance, help and instruction.

Respondents were asked question six, how did they find their advisors? Were they helpful or supportive? Question nine was also asked, whether KUC provided ongoing contact or support; if not did respondents' think this would be useful?

The unanimous verdict was that in all sections, advisors were *"very supportive"* (Respondent 3), *"…a Godsend"* (Respondent 1), *"more than helpful"* (Respondent 8), *"Nothing is too much trouble for them"* (Respondent 5), *"Very professional, immensely helpful."* (Respondent 6).

Everyone found staying in touch with their advisor relatively easily, by e-mail, telephone or mobile phone:
"…(he's) *always there, you can ring him up anytime – if he's not there he gets back in touch with you"* (Respondent 8).
One person who was interviewed had previously been self-employed, but his business had now closed down. He was pleased with the valuable advice he was getting at KUC. After consultations with his advisor, he realises where he went wrong previously, and was gratified to have had such a supportive advisor. He said; *"I could never write a business plan like* (his advisor's) *done, it makes me sound good!"* (Respondent 7). Besides getting help with his business plan, accounts and marketing, his advisor was helping him with his financial difficulties, resulting in him now receiving Tax Credits.

"I don't feel at any time like I'm forgotten"

Of the respondents who had completed their course or session with KUC, all thought that they had been well supported throughout, and felt they could contact their advisor whenever necessary. They all spoke of how their designated advisor would ring or e-mail them, to

see how they were progressing; one advisor even contacted her client when she was on honeymoon! Even after completing their sessions, their advisors still rang them to see how they were progressing:
"I don't feel at any time like I'm forgotten" (Respondent 1).

The majority of respondents outlined how they were given much more advice than they had anticipated and observed how informed their advisors were, giving them information that they previously knew nothing about,
"…he's very knowledgeable, if he doesn't know, he'll know someone who does" (Respondent 7), *"… she read me right… she listened to what I said"* (Respondent 1).

Quite a few respondents were at pains to tell me how surprised and pleased they were that they saw the same advisor time after time. Respondent 1 stated: *"You're not just a case, you feel that they're really interested"*,
"It's one-on-one here, you don't get that anywhere else." (Respondent 6). Other respondents expressed similar viewpoints.

One respondent agreed, stating *"I thought I'd see him just the once, but you get assigned to one person and they don't rush you. You're not getting passed from pillar to post at KUC."* (Respondent 8), this was the general opinion.

"It's one-on-one here, you don't get that anywhere else."

Some found that this concept did not apply when they visited the Job Centre, which appeared to be a negative experience. One respondent visited the Job Centre on numerous occasions with his business idea and felt that he got no support whatsoever, *"you go there, you've got all these things in place and all they do is say 'here's a job'. Maybe it's a fault with the way its run, you're just a statistic"* (Respondent 6, reiterating the point he made earlier). He found the service in KUC much more personal and more suited to his needs.

A number of respondents outlined how they had developed a good relationship with their advisors. Two respondents who took part in the research were going to visit their advisors straight afterwards, even though they had finished their consultations with KUC. One respondent joked that I should not tell his advisor how good he was, in case he got 'big-headed!' A majority of respondents considered that they had the best advisor, and spoke highly of them. Some commented that they would expect the same high standard in other areas of KUC, now that they knew more about the organisation. They would have no hesitation in visiting other sections.

"I know that the support's there if I need it… I know the door's not closed"

When I asked those who had completed their sessions if KUC provided them with enough support afterwards, all respondents felt that they were, and are, given the support they need. This may be in the form of occasional telephone calls or e-mails, but it was obviously much appreciated. Therefore, the second part of the question was, in effect, redundant; obviously, there was ongoing support given to former clients.

Each respondent outlined how their advisors supported them, and this was obviously important to them all.
One person summed up the opinion of all respondents:

"I know that the support's there if I need it… I know the door's not closed" (Respondent 1, who has now finished her session with her advisor).

Benefits from visiting KUC

This section of the report sets out an understanding of the benefits that visiting KUC has given respondents, or their families.

Respondents were asked what, if anything, has changed since visiting the organisation. If their experience had been positive, would they recommend KUC to other people?

All considered that their situation had changed for the better, or will in the future, as a result of their time spent at KUC.
"It's been great, they've given me loads of ideas and the training's great." (Respondent 3), summarising the general observations that were voiced.

"… small steps, but they're the right steps."

One respondent talked of how unconfident she felt when first visiting the Employment and Skills section, now she was in higher education. She said that she would never have considered returning to education and acknowledged that this might have been due to her lack of confidence. She sees herself as completely different to before, feeling considerably more confident. After having to leave her profession, she feared that she had no future suitable career prospects, citing her age (she is forty). She stated that she came for advice without knowing where to turn to next. *"I thought I was on the scrap-heap, then* (advisor) *came in and within five minutes I thought it's gonna be ok"* (Respondent 1).

She cannot believe the difference her consultations have made, she much more secure about her future. Now she is,
"…able to give something back, and keep my dignity and pride" (Respondent 1).
The course she is undertaking will help her find a career with flexible hours that will suit her family commitments. This, she felt, would benefit her family. In addition, the voluntary work she is undertaking will benefit that particular charity.

She feels that she is taking *"… small steps, but they're the right steps."*

Of the respondents still receiving support off KUC, one was hopeful of gaining employment because he had a professional, current CV, something that he never had before. He has also received useful advice and contacts that will help him find employment. He outlined that when he gets work it will help him with the mortgage, so would definitely benefit his family.

Another respondent, in the process of establishing his business, stated that he had a choice after being made redundant, either *"…chase after jobs which aren't there, or get off your backside and do something."* (Respondent 7).

He outlined how he is getting help with his business plan, accounts and marketing, his advisor had also helped him with his financial difficulties, with the result that he now receives Tax Credits. He is due to start training for a higher level licence that he was unaware of, (his advisor told him to *"go for it!"*). He has also had assistance in setting up a bank account, something he had difficulty with before. He felt that he was receiving valuable advice at KUC and predicted that the benefit to him and his family will be immense. One of the primary benefits being that he will soon be able to pay off his debts to his family, something that had been troubling him.

Two respondents had embarked on free training schemes, which they did not know existed, but which are now necessary for continued employment with their respective industries. This was through the 'Fresh Start' initiative, which KUC had set up for them. They both now consider that this training will give them better opportunities in the future that they would never have had before. They would never have been able to pay for such training, and were extremely grateful for the advice. Respondent 3 outlined how he is training for a testing certificate, which would enable him to start up his own business in the future if he could not find employment. Grant funding of up to £500 is sometimes available for courses, or for equipment for new businesses (KUC 2007). Many respondents told me of how important this has

been to them, agreeing that they could never have afforded that amount of money for training.
Some thought that the professional advice they received would have been very expensive in other organisations, and that they were immensely grateful for the fact that it was a completely free service.

One respondent explained how her business advisor suggested different aspects of her business area that she had never considered before. She had intended to become a driving instructor, as a franchise, within a larger business. Following advice, she is now starting up independently. She outlined how she now has a professional business and marketing plan, which can be used to access funding. Her advisor has helped her with a theory-training course that she did not consider before; this will be available to her at no cost. In this way she can be independent and considers that this potential extra income will benefit not only herself, but also her mother whom she lives with.

"I've got a way to go yet, but it has really benefited me, definitely" Respondent 1, summarising the unanimous viewpoint.

The respondent who had attended the computer course outlined how he is now in regular contact with his sister, who lives in New Zealand. He wanted to stress how much this has benefited himself, his wife and his relatives. He also is a member of an art club, and can show his sister his new pieces of work via the Internet. He is a pensioner and doubted that he could ever afford to fly to New Zealand, so this contact is important to him.

"I've got a way to go yet, but it has really benefited me, definitely"

The benefits to all respondents from visiting KUC vary greatly; however, each person highlighted how important they are to their individual situations.

'Word of mouth' is recognised by KUC as an effective method of advertising its services (KUC 2007). As outlined earlier, only two respondents had heard about KUC through friends initially. However, when asked if they would recommend KUC to anyone else, the unanimous verdict was a definite 'yes', and indeed five respondents had already done so. Everyone wanted to express his or her gratitude to the organisation. Two respondents stated that they would only recommend KUC to people who were serious about getting help and advice, *"…to make sure they're not just doing it for the free training."* (Respondent 7). They were so pleased with the service they received that they did not want anyone to waste KUC's time.

Anything that KUC can improve? Any further comments?

This final section reports findings of how KUC can improve its service to clients. It also highlights any further comments that respondents have about the organisation.

There were pauses when I asked the respondents if there was anything that KUC could do to improve its services, this seemed to be the most difficult question to answer. *"I'm finding it hard to say anything bad!"* replied Respondent 7. One person jokingly asked if he could have a week to think about it, but after a pause thought a wider variety of classes would greatly enhance the organisation. There were no other suggestions as to how KUC could improve its service.

When asked if they had any further comments, there was an overall agreement that his or her visit to KUC had been an immensely positive experience.

Half of the respondents, who were all local residents, thought that KUC was lacking in publicity, although I had not thought to ask about this. *"I just don't think it's 'out there' enough, it's not publicised enough."* (Respondent 1). They wanted more people to know about the excellent service that KUC has to offer.

'we're on your side, we wanna help you'

A number of respondents thought that the organisation was linked with official organisations, for instance the Job Centre, before they came to KUC, *"I thought it was a government centre, they need to put over 'we're on your side, we wanna help you'."* (Respondent 7).

A minority of respondents were of the opinion that this perception may prevent people returning to KUC in the future.

Of those who originally thought KUC was just for unemployed people, two concluded that the word 'unemployed' in its title could give out

that impression. *"All you keep coming back to is the name."* (Respondent 6). *"I'm not the only one that thinks it's for benefits, all my friends seem to have the same idea."* She said, fearing that *"it could create a social barrier."* (Respondent 1). She referred to this theme several times throughout the interview; she told me she *'wanted to get that point across'*.

"Very professional, immensely helpful" (Respondent 6), *"It's been great, they've given me loads of ideas and the training's great."* (Respondent 3), concluding some of the general observations.

For one respondent, an important aspect of KUC's confidential service was that she was not '*judged*' or discriminated against. She noted that other organisations claim not to discriminate, but she stated that often, that was not always the case.

"Very professional, immensely helpful"

One respondent thought its uniqueness as a community project was a huge advantage for KUC, *"…it brings people together, socialising is part of the learning experience"* (Respondent 5). He discussed how rare it was to find an organisation that supported working class people in the area and provided such opportunities for everyone. Something that would be lost in government type, or privately owned organisations, he observed.

It is obvious from the interviews that KUC is of great benefit to many different people, and provides a unique free, community-led service for everyone. All respondents have spoken, in glowing terms, of the welcoming, approachable and professional advisors. Everyone who took part in this research agreed that they have more than benefited from their consultations.

Even though I asked, no one could think of any way that KUC could improve its service. With every interview, this appeared to be the hardest to answer, evidence of the outstanding service they have all received.

"I can't say enough how good this centre is, I wish I'd known about it earlier" (Respondent 1).

"I can't say enough how good this centre is…"

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KUC is a well established, popular, local organisation. All respondents were highly complimentary of their advisors, and thought that they received an excellent service throughout. Everyone has stated that KUC has had a positive impact on their lives, in many different ways. Many feel optimistic for the future, which they previously never felt. People expressed their renewed confidence and self esteem after visiting it. Some have gained brand new skills, for instance learning to use a computer, something that many take for granted. Some respondents feel more equipped to tackle the increasingly difficult employment market, through either training or education. Some are in the process of establishing their own businesses. From evidence gained by interviews, it is patently clear that these respondents have gained an enormous amount from accessing KUC's services.

The purpose of this research was to demonstrate the social impact that KUC has on its clients. After conducting semi-structured interviews with eight KUC clients, the evidence of KUC's social impact can be found in the testimonies of the eight people who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

The respondents who participated in this research all found out about KUC through various means. The Job Centre had recommended KUC to three people, evidence of the two organisations working in partnership. However, one respondent did not receive this advice, and in the interview suggested it as good practice.

Everyone had positive first impressions of the organisation, although some expressed nervousness, which soon dissipated after meeting their first meeting. One respondent concluded that wrong preconceptions about KUC being linked to Job Centres may have caused anxieties, which he now knows is untrue.

The different areas of KUC were accessed for various reasons; some respondents sought career or business advice, due to being made

redundant, one respondent completed a computer course. The Employment and Skills section have supported a number of respondents onto training or education courses, having been encouraged to take up new training opportunities by their advisors. Within the Business Advice section, two respondents are now in the process of establishing their own businesses. They were supported with business plans and marketing, and have since received advice and funding for training within their trade, that they did not go to KUC for, nor did they know about. One respondent has recently started up in business with support from his advisor. One also had support with financial problems, which was unexpected. These services could be regarded as adding an extra, enhanced impact, something that other respondents felt they received in their sections.

Support from advisors was considered to be excellent. Each told of how they were fully supported even when their consultations had ended. Respondents spoke of a strong, continued system of support, by telephone or e-mail. Advisors would always return the communication, if they were unavailable for any reason. A number of respondents expressed pleasant surprised at being assigned just one advisor, something they had not anticipated.

Everyone taking part thought that their visit to KUC would benefit not only themselves, but also their families. This ranged from keeping in contact with overseas relatives by e-mail, establishing their own businesses, or gaining employment by re-training. Those benefits could be gained through extra income, becoming self-employed, studying for a better career or re-training to enhance their employment potential. One respondent talked movingly of how she kept her dignity and pride, thanks to KUC. All taking part outlined how they would recommend KUC to others, but only someone who was serious about getting advice. Some respondents had already recommended the organisation. They were obviously pleased with the support they received.

When asked what KUC could improve, the replies were carefully considered, the only suggestion from one respondent, after a long pause, was a wider range of leisure classes. No one else could identify

anything that could improve KUC, they all agreed that the organisation provided an exceptional service. Some outlined the misconception that KUC was part of an official organisation, and thought that this may be a barrier. A minority of respondents felt that the word 'unemployment' in KUC's title was negative. Some thought KUC was exclusively for people who were unemployed, and therefore did not apply to them as they were either in work, or had retired. The majority of respondents, pleased with their experience, highlighted how they thought increased publicity and public awareness would benefit KUC and other people.

APPENDICES

RESEARCH METHODS

KUC participated in a successful Social Policy Project in 2008 with a University of Liverpool student and were keen to be involved in further research in collaboration with Interchange.

Sample

In order to identify respondents in the following research, instead of names. I have used numbers one to eight. The decision to use numbers as opposed to names is in order to provide and maintain anonymity throughout the project. For the same reason, the names of the various team members in KUC have also been omitted; instead, they will be referred to as 'advisor'.

The circumstances of all eight respondents who participated in this research varied considerably. One respondent is looking for work and has received CV and job guidance from KUC. Two respondents are on industry approved training schemes through KUC. Two are in the process of starting up their own businesses (and are still in consultation with their advisors). One respondent has successfully established his business with the help of KUC. One respondent is halfway through a higher education course, again with support from her advisor at KUC. One respondent is retired, and wanted to learn how to use a computer.

A number of customers who had completed KUC's evaluation sheets after using their services, stated a willingness to be contacted should the need arise. They were sent an introductory letter, outlining who I was and the nature of the research. A copy of this letter can be found in the appendices section of this report. Some of these clients participated in the research. However, not everyone who participated had completed an evaluation sheet, some were still receiving advice from the organisation. After consultation with the Business Advice manager, Kathy Runswick and my research supervisor, it was agreed that the project would take the form of semi-structured interviews and telephone interviews. KUC eventually would like to undertake a

large-scale research project. However, due to time limitations, this piece of research will interview eight people, all previous KUC clients. The research aims to ask clients whether attending any of KUC's services has benefited them, and what impact this had for the wider community.

Making the research happen

In order to begin the research, it was necessary to contact former clients of KUC. After a meeting on 27 January 2009, it was agreed with Kathy Runswick that qualitative research should take place in the form of semi-structured interviews. Kerry Stone, working on behalf of the management, contacted present and former clients from all three departments, who had completed evaluation forms agreeing to further contact from KUC. A list of clients was identified, fourteen from the Business Advice section, fourteen from the Employment and Skills section, and 37 from the Learning Centre. I wrote an introductory letter, briefly stating the objectives and details of the research, and this was forwarded to these clients. A copy of this introductory letter may be found in the appendices section. The committee room in KUC was booked for interviews from 10am to 12pm on the 20 February, 27 February and 13 March. Kerry informed me later on that week that a small number of clients had responded to the letter, and agreed to take part in the research, either in person at the Westhead Avenue building, or by telephone. All of the clients who had responded were residents in the Knowsley area.

Table 1: Interview schedule

Respondent	Date	Section of KUC	male/ female	past/ present client	Interview: telephone/ in person
Respondent 1	20/2/09	Employment & Skills	female	past	in person
Respondent 2	20/2/09	Employment & Skills	male	past	telephone
Respondent 3	20/2/09	Employment & Skills	male	past	telephone
Respondent 4	20/2/09	Employment & Skills	male	present	telephone
Respondent 5	27/2/09	Learning Centre	male	past	in person
Respondent 6	27/2/09	Business Advice	male	past	in person
Respondent 7	27/2/09	Business Advice	male	present	in person
Respondent 8	13/3/09	Business Advice	female	present	in person

The final respondent was female, which I had specifically requested, as the majority of interviewes had been male so far. Statistics from December 2006 to May 2007 show that 371 of the Business Advice teams' clients are male; compared to 138 being female. The gap between male and female clients is smaller within the Employment and Skills section. During the same period, 251 of their clients were male, and 195 were female (KUC 2007). There are six male and two female respondents participating in this report, which somewhat reflects the ratio of business and employment clients. In total, eight people took part in these semi-structured interviews. Four of the interviews were in person, on KUC's Westhead Avenue premises, and four were by telephone. This report, therefore, cannot reflect the views of every client who visited KUC, only the relatively small sample group who agreed to take part.

In total, 11 questions were put to the respondents. The questions were chosen to relate to the organisation and what the respondents thought about their time there. No questions of a personal or sensitive nature were asked. It was important that no one was embarrassed by them. The people taking part answered each question; no questions remained unanswered.

Because the data was analysed thematically, it was coded into five main themes, relating to the 11 questions asked.

Social research may be described as a "purposeful and systematic acquisition and presentation of information about social issues" (Hall and Hall 2004: 5). This project is a piece of qualitative work, which focuses on collating words as opposed to numerical data, which would describe a quantitative project. Qualitative research uses 'inductive' and 'explorative' methods of obtaining findings (David and Sutton 2004: 77). I used semi-structured questions for this piece of work. A copy of the questions used can be found in the appendices section of this report. Semi structured questions are useful in order to try to get as much information as possible from the respondents (Hall and Hall 2004). All of the questions used were open-ended, so that the respondents could expand and tell me their views in more detail. Structured questions may be too formal for qualitative research; inductive, open-ended questions are far more suited for this type of project, but would not suit larger pieces of work (David and Sutton 2004). Before any face to face interviews began, I ensured that the respondents had a copy of the information sheet, and had signed a consent form. Copies of both can be found in the appendices section of the report.

Interviews

The interviewing of people is by far the most common method of collecting qualitative data (Fielding and Thomas 2001). It is important that the setting of the interviews is comfortable, friendly and without interruption (David and Sutton 2004). In the case of my research, the committee room within the KUC building was more than suitable. Although the researcher may not have a hypothesis (David and Sutton 2004), it was still necessary to find out what needed investigating, the impact of KUC on the people who used its services.

Face to face interviews, as used in this research, may put the respondents and researcher at risk. Participants may say things that put themselves in a vulnerable position, or make the researcher feel threatened (David and Sutton 2004), therefore, risk assessments were made before the research commenced.

For this research, it was necessary to interview some clients by telephone, as they were unable to come to KUC premises. Telephone interviews have become an increasingly popular method of conducting social research, especially with time shortages (Fielding and Thomas 2001). There are however, disadvantages. Body language is not visible and therefore the researcher may miss important points (Fielding and Thomas 2001). Also, there may some issues of mistrust, as this method is widely used in market research. All respondents who took part in telephone interviews had been informed about all aspects of this research.

Ethics and the British Sociological Association

Qualitative research and interviews particularly, present clear ethical issues, as opposed to quantitative work where computerised methods of gaining data can generally offer confidentiality (Steinar 2007). Researchers have a duty to be true to the data findings, whilst still protecting the people involved. Care must be taken to ensure that the rights of the participants are not ignored in the quest to obtain information (British Sociological Association 2002).

Ethical consideration has been a priority throughout all stages of this research, cleared by the University before embarking. The researcher must always adhere to the Statement of Ethical Practice, by the British Sociological Association (2002). The principle of 'informed consent' (David and Sutton 2004: 19) was adhered to, ensuring that participants remained anonymous, and were aware of the research purpose. The information sheets given to KUC clients outline these principles. The letter also informed participants that only the Chief Executives at KUC, my University lecturer and myself have access to the information. I conveyed this information before the start of every interview also. This was particularly important for the small number of participants that took part in the research, and had not received my introductory letter. The people taking part in this research were informed beforehand that they would be afforded anonymity (Steinar 2007). This was important as their quotes and statements formed the data; and they have remained anonymous in the report.

For this research, I used a recording device with the face to face interviews. I always asked the participants if they agreed to its use, and would have taken notes if necessary. I advised participants that any recording would be deleted once I had used it for my research, as recommended by the British Sociological Association (2002).

Observation

Observation and the use of field notes can be useful in the accumulation of data for qualitative research, but there is the possibility that it may be 'selective' (Hall and Hall 2004: 104). The observation with this project began from the first contact with KUC. Many observations have been recorded in a 'reflective diary'. All participants were given informed consent about the research, they were aware of the reasons, and gave consent for the interviews to take place (Hall and Hall 2004).

Disadvantages of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research may not be as reliable as quantitative research, and therefore may not be as truthful. Ethnographic methods of research may involve the author observing the everyday life of people (David and Sutton 2004). This may be defined as participant observation, although this was not a method used in this piece of research. Covert research methods may be used in order to gain a true insight into people's lives, but they invade the privacy of the subjects (David and Sutton 2004), and they were not employed in this research.

Thematic Analysis

The data that emerges from semi-structured interviews may be grouped into themes, making subsequent analysis easier and more constructive. Using the interview guide, or questions, each theme can be analysed, 'thematic analysis' (Hall and Hall 2004: 153). For this work, a qualitative data matrix was produced, using large sheets of paper, making it easy to compare answers and responses. Cross-tabulation of answers, using different variables such as age or gender, may also be possible, but was not the case with my research.

Our Ref: BAT/E&S/ L/C/ KUC

My name is Yvette Lewis. I am a 3rd year Social Policy and Sociology student at Liverpool University. As part of my final year dissertation, I am conducting a research project on behalf of KUC to measure the impact of this organisation on the community.

As a recent user of KUC, would it be at all possible for you to take part in some research? This would be in the form of small focus groups and a short interview held at KUC, on either **Friday 20th February or Friday 27th February between 10am – 12pm.** The full details will be explained to you, but all research will be treated with the utmost confidence, and no-one taking part will be identified in any way. The only people who will have access to the findings will be the Chief Executives at KUC, my University lecturer and myself.

This research is a vital part of my dissertation project and my degree, and I would really appreciate it if you could come along and help me with it.

If you would like to attend or for further information please contact Kerry Stone on 548 0001

Yours sincerely

Yvette Lewis

Semi-structured interview Questions.
(BUSINESS ADVICE)

Start off with introductions- and a brief outline about the research.

(Don't forget to turn recorder on!!!)

1) How did you hear about KUC?

2) What were your first impressions of KUC? (What did you think when you first came here?)

3) What did you know about KUC when you first came?

4) How did you end up in this section of KUC? (Did you originally come here for employment advice/ business advice/ training advice?

5) Why did you come to KUC? What was the main reason? Was it to…

(PROMPTS)

(BUSINESS ADVICE)

- Get support with a business idea - ask what was your business idea
- Get legal advice
- Get financial advice
- Get help with advertising
- Get help with starting a new business
- Sent here by another organisation

6) How did you find the employment / business / training team? Were they helpful or supportive? In what way?

7) What has changed since visiting KUC? What benefits have you felt?

(PROMPTS)

- Got a job
- Started voluntary work
- I feel more confident
- Able to help with children's homework
- Started a course / training
- Got ideas for a new business
- Started at college
- Joined an organisation / group / meeting
- Made new friends

8) Do you think this has benefited other people as well as yourself? (ie friends / children / family / voluntary groups) In what way?

9) Has KUC provided you with any ongoing contacts or support? If not do you think this would be useful? Why?

10) Would you recommend KUC to others? Why?

11) Is there anything that KUC can do to improve it's services? Is there anything else you'd like to say about KUC?

Semi-structured interview Questions.
(EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS SECTION)

Start off with introductions- and a brief outline about the research.

(Don't forget to turn recorder on!!!)

1) How did you hear about KUC?

2) What were your first impressions of KUC? (What did you think when you first came here?)

3) What did you know about KUC when you first came?

4) How did you end up in this section of KUC? (Did you originally come here for employment advice/ business advice/ training advice?

5) Why did you come to KUC? What was the main reason? Was it to…

(PROMPTS)

(EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS SECTION)

- Get career advice
- Find out how to apply for a particular job
- Find out what skills are needed to get a better job
- Get help with interviews/CV's/online applications
- Sent here by another organisation

6) How did you find the employment / business / training team? Were they helpful or supportive? In what way?

7) What has changed since visiting KUC? What benefits have you felt?

(PROMPTS)

- Got a job
- Started voluntary work
- I feel more confident
- Able to help with children's homework
- Started a course / training
- Got ideas for a new business
- Started at college
- Joined an organisation / group / meeting
- Made new friends

8) Do you think this has benefited other people as well as yourself? (ie friends / children / family / voluntary groups) In what way?

9) Has KUC provided you with any ongoing contacts or support? If not do you think this would be useful? Why?

10) Would you recommend KUC to others? Why?

11) Is there anything that KUC can do to improve it's services? Is there anything else you'd like to say about KUC?

Semi-structured interview Questions.
(LEARNING CENTRE)

Start off with introductions- and a brief outline about the research.

(Don't forget to turn recorder on!!!)

1) How did you hear about KUC?

2) What were your first impressions of KUC? (What did you think when you first came here?)

3) What did you know about KUC when you first came?

4) How did you end up in this section of KUC? (Did you originally come here for employment advice/ business advice/ training advice?

5) Why did you come to KUC? What was the main reason? Was it to…

(PROMPTS)

(LEARNING CENTRE)

- Get advice about different courses
- Get a new skill
- Get a qualification
- Do a course I've always wanted to do
- Learn how to use a computer

6) How did you find the employment / business / training team? Were they helpful or supportive? In what way?

7) What has changed since visiting KUC? What benefits have you felt?

(PROMPTS)

- Got a job
- Started voluntary work
- I feel more confident
- Able to help with children's homework
- Started a course / training
- Got ideas for a new business
- Started at college
- Joined an organisation / group / meeting
- Made new friends

8) Do you think this has benefited other people as well as yourself? (ie friends / children / family / voluntary groups) In what way?

9) Has KUC provided you with any ongoing contacts or support? If not do you think this would be useful? Why?

10) Would you recommend KUC to others? Why?

11) Is there anything that KUC can do to improve it's services? Is there anything else you'd like to say about KUC?

Yvette Lewis

University of Liverpool

Applied Social Research Project

Information Sheet

"What impact has KUC had on its clients?" February 2009

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information, and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends and family if you wish. Please note that you do not have to accept this information if you do not wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this study?

My name is Yvette Lewis and I am a 3rd year Sociology and Social Policy student at the University of Liverpool. I am conducting a piece of research into the impact that KUC has had on the people who have used its services. This research is a vital part of my degree, and involves running a series of focus groups, and then

interviewing people. The research will also be of benefit to KUC and the community.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

For this research, it is necessary to hear the opinions of people who have recently visited KUC's 'Employment and Skills', 'Business Advice' and 'Training' departments.

You are under no obligation to take part, it is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without question if you wish.

What will happen if I take part?

This research will involve answering some questions in a small focus group, in one of KUC's meeting rooms at a time that is suitable. The answers will be recorded by the use of a mp3 player, if that is acceptable. If not, then notes will be taken instead.

I hope that the focus group will only take 15 or 20 minutes.

The next part of the research will involve an interview with one or two people who have agreed to take part.

I will be the only person carrying out the focus groups and interviews. Apart from myself, the only people to see the work will be my university lecturer and the manager at KUC. No other

person will be able to see the findings, and the work will not be published.

Participants will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There will be no risks involved in any part of this project, nor will there be any benefits involved, except the satisfaction of knowing that you have helped me with my degree course, and KUC!

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are not happy with the research, or if there is a problem, please speak to me, or e.mail me at Y.P.Lewis@student.liverpool.ac.uk and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot approach me with, then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on (0151) 794 8290, or e mail ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide my name, and the name and description of the study, (so that it can be identified).

Will my participation be kept confidential?

All information will kept completely confidential. I will be the only person collecting any research findings. Anyone taking part will at all times, remain anonymous. Only my university lecturer, the manager of KUC and myself will be able to look at the research. Any questionnaires used will be shredded as soon as possible. Any recorded answers will be deleted once the information is collected.

Will my taking part be covered by an insurance scheme?

People taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study will have adequate cover.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will not be published. They will be used to make a report which forms part of my degree. Only the university lecturer marking the report will be able to access it. KUC will also have a copy of the final report.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time without having to explain why. Any information collected up to the period of withdrawal will be used, if you are happy for me to do so. If not, the data will be taken out of the report. Any information you give me will be destroyed as outlined above.

Who should I contact if I have any further questions?

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact myself,

Yvette Lewis

C/o University of Liverpool

School of Sociology and Social Policy

Eleanor Rathbone Building

Bedford Street South

Liverpool

L69 7ZA

Telephone (General Office) 0151 794 2995/2996/3008

Consent form

Title of Research Project

"What impact has KUC had on its clients?"

Researcher Yvette Lewis **Please initial Box**

1) I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated February 2009, for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions that may be necessary. [ ]

2) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and my rights will be unaffected. [ ]

3) I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can ask at any time for access to the information that I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. [ ]

4) I agree to take part in the above study. [ ]

Participant Name Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

The contact details of researcher are:

Yvette Lewis

C/o University of Liverpool

School of Sociology and Social Policy

Eleanor Rathbone Building

Bedford Street South

Liverpool

L69 7ZA

(e mail) Y.P.Lewis@student.liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone (General Office) 0151 794 2995/2996/3008

BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Sociological Association (2002) '*Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association*'

http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm. (Accessed 2/2/08).

Chapple, N. (1975) *Kirkby New Town, An Objective Assessment of Social, Economic and Police Problems.* Vol. 1- Merseyside Police

David, M. and Sutton, C., (2004) *Social Research - The Basics.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Down, R. (2008) *'Everton Stadium vital for Kirkby's survival'* http://www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk/everton-fc/evertonfc-news/tm_h (Accessed 5/12/08).

Esher, L., (1981) *A Broken Wave- The Rebuilding of England 1940-1980.* London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Fielding, N. and Thomas, H. (2001) 'Qualitative Interviewing' in Gilbert, N. (ed) (2001) *Researching Social Life,* London: Sage Publications Ltd (pp. 123-144).

Forrester, K., and Ward, K., (1986) 'Organising the Unemployed? The TUC and the Unemployed Workers Centres' *Industrial Relations,* 17 (1) pp 46-56.

Hilditch (2005) 'Fighting to keep a roof over our heads- Kirkby Rent Strikes *Socialist Worker* http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/print_art.php?id=6706 (Accessed 5/2/09).

Hall, I. And Hall, D., (2004) *Evaluation and Social Research,* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, P. and Wilks-Heeg, S. (2004) 'Capitalising Culture: Liverpool 2008', *Local Economy* 19 (4) pp. 341-360.

KUC Social, Environmental and Economic Accounts (06-07), Kirkby: KUC.

KUC Annual Report (07-08), Kirkby: KUC.

Lister, P., (1983) 'Regional policies and industrial development on Merseyside, 1930-1960' in Anderson, B., and Stoney, P., (eds) (1983) *Commerce, Industry and Transport: Studies in Economic Change on Merseyside,* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Meegan, R., (1989) 'Paradise postponed: The growth and decline of Merseyside's outer estates' in Cook, P., (ed) (1989) *Localities-The Changing Face of Urban Britain* London: Unwin Hyman Ltd. (pp. 198-234).

Meegan, R., (1990) 'Merseyside' in Harlowe, M., Pickvance, C., and Urry, J., (eds) (1990) *Place, Policy and Politics-Do Localities Matter?* London: Unwin Hyam Ltd. (pp. 87-107).

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004) 'Jobs and Enterprise in deprived Areas' *Social Exclusion Report,* London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Office for National Statistics 'Neighbourhood Statistics' (undated) http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile… (Accessed 23/1/09 & 18/3/09).

Picket, K. and Boulton, D., (1974) *Migration and Social Adjustment-Kirkby and Maghull* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Sklair, L., (1975) 'The Struggle Against the Housing Finance Act' in Milliband, R., and Saville, J., (eds) *The Socialist Register,* London: the Merlin Press Ltd.

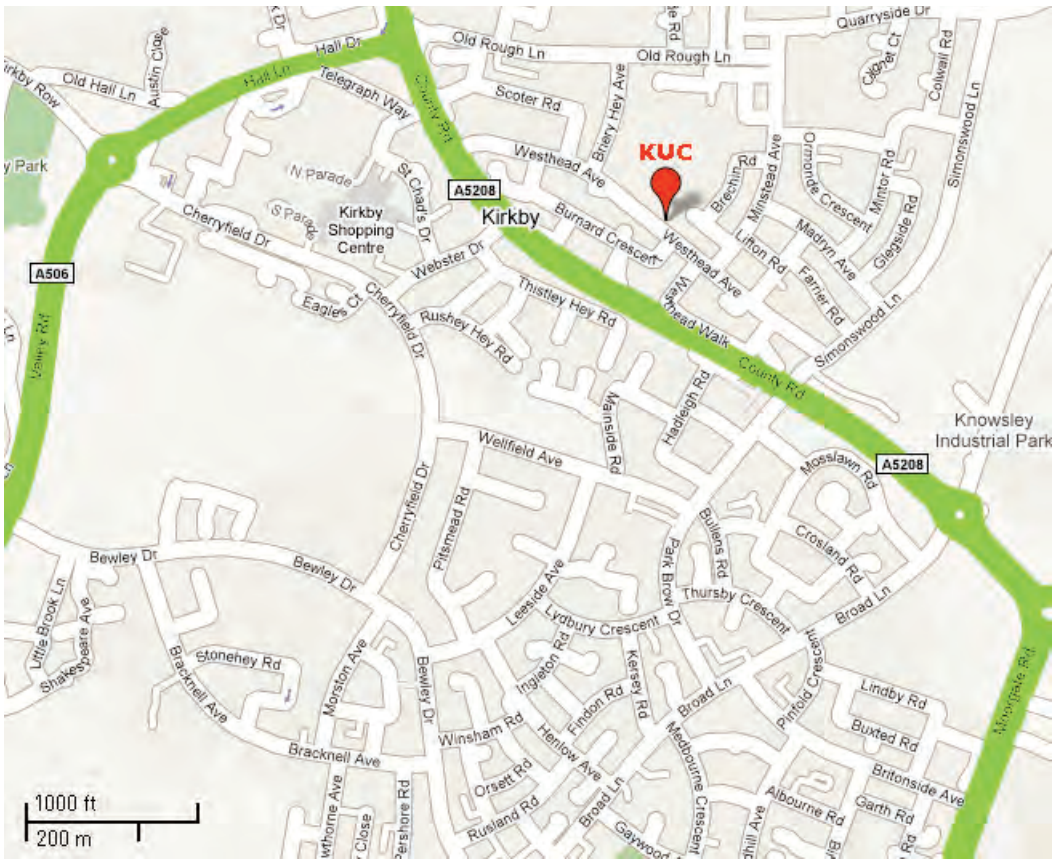
Steinar, K., (2007) *Doing Interviews,* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Sullivan, M., (1994) *Modern Social Policy,* Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Tombs, S., (2005) 'Capitalism Makes You Sick!' in http://www.catalystmedia.org.uk/issues/nerve7/asbestos_sg.htm (Accessed 1/5/09).

Tombs, S., and Whyte, D., (2004) 'What About the Real Habitual Criminals?' in http://www.catalystmedia.org.uk/issues/nerve3/real_criminals.htm (Accessed 1/5/09).

Trades Union Congress (TUC) 'Unemployed Workers Centres' (undated) http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/about_uwc.cfm (Accessed 4/3/09).



KUC
Westhead Avenue,
Northwood,
Kirkby,
Knowsley
L33 0XN

Tel: 0151 548 0001
Fax: 0151 548 1160
Email: enquiries@kuc.org.uk

Westhead Avenue, Kirkby Premises