



JESMOND LOCAL ^{NE2}

*News, views... and who's who in **your** neighbourhood*

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What is JesmondLocal?

Sometimes we describe it as a journalism equivalent of the Hadron Collider – throwing a bunch of ideas, people, and projects together to see what sticks and what breaks.

And while we can't yet claim to have found some elusive particle that answers all the questions facing journalism, we think we are inching our way towards some important discoveries: or at least how, in our locality, we can create a model for reporting that is sustainable, independent and community-led.

Who are we?

JesmondLocal is a loose collective of professional journalists, educators and creatives, students and community supporters... and anyone else we can pull in for specific projects.

But we do have a mission statement: to help people and communities tell their own stories, in order to build cohesive communities around locations and shared interests.

And our vision of how we'll do this is by cascading the skills of storytelling – reporting and journalism – from professionals to students to communities.

In a nutshell, we recruit a dozen to 15 student journalists each year, show and help them practise the skills, techniques, tools and values of independent, trustworthy, multimedia, grassroots reporting – then equip those students to pass on these newly-acquired skills, techniques, tools and values to would-be “citizen reporters” in the community.

To date we've struck successful partnerships with Newcastle University, the BBC, Waitrose and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. We've won some funding for community reporting bootcamps (as featured on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme). We've been designated a “beacon hub” by MediaTrust. We've even bagged some advertising. But most of the time, **JesmondLocal** runs on the good will of its volunteers.

How did it start?

Ian Wylie was a staff writer and section editor at The Guardian for 16 years, until he took voluntary redundancy in 2009. He now freelances for newspapers (Financial Times, Guardian) and magazines (Management Today, Monocle – more details at <http://ianwylie.co.uk>). But a nagging itch that he ought to be better connected to where he lived (Newcastle upon Tyne) brought him into contact with David Baines, a Newcastle University lecturer with a research interest in hyperlocal journalism. Baines encouraged Wylie to recruit some of his students as volunteers and set up a news service for Jesmond, a suburb close to Newcastle upon Tyne city centre.

What have we learned so far?

1. Student reporters need real world, grassroots work experience.

For obvious reasons, opportunities for gaining experience in established news organisations are increasingly scarce. There is no shortage of classroom-based teaching, but would-be reporters, professional or otherwise, need first-hand, on-the-ground experience so they can learn the basics of newsgathering and reporting. We give each student a patch (crime, sport, health, environment etc) just as any local newspaper would do and show them how to build up their contacts book, work up story ideas, pitch them to a news desk etc. Hyperlocal/local reporting may not offer the sexy, celeb-filled material many of our volunteers prefer to read, but we impress upon them that Jesmond, like any community, can be a microcosm of the wider world. When you learn the basics of covering a local politics story in Jesmond, for example, you're learning the basics of covering a political story at Westminster or Washington.

2. News organisations want to recruit talent with real world, grassroots news experience.

Our students often tell us that when invited to interview with the BBC, Sky and other news organisations, the **JesmondLocal** experience on their CVs is what gets discussed the most.

3. What student journalists need to learn is changing all the time.

The best university journalism courses are refreshed maybe once each academic year. But the tools, techniques and skills that reporters need in 2012 are being refreshed almost daily. We offer our students three "semesters of learning" where, at our weekly team meetings, we run through a constantly changing curriculum of the latest multimedia tools, techniques and skills – Skyping experts from around the world to bring our volunteers the freshest insights.

4. Print is not dead.

Convincing an advertiser to spend even a small amount of money on a local online ad is almost impossible. But as soon as you mention the word "magazine", local advertisers begin to take notice. Last Christmas, we created a magazine around the Turner Prize in just 48 hours at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. In just a week, we sold enough print advertising not just to cover the costs of the magazine, but turn us a small profit (which we then foolishly donated to charity).

5. Projects accelerate learning and build community.

The **JesmondLocal** website, Facebook page and Twitter feed remain the hub for what it does. But one-off projects, such as community radio shows and short films fast forward progress. For some projects we pull in favours from a variety of creative professionals: illustrators, writers, photographers and film-makers. The chance to work alongside each other gives everyone involved – professionals and volunteers – an opportunity to learn and explore new working partnerships.

6. Journalists have a part to play

Reporters and journalists have a crucial role to play in halting the slide in civic engagement, by reconnecting journalism with its democratic roots. We live-blog council ward meetings, so that the important decisions taken about our community are heard beyond the half dozen elderly people who bother to attend in person. We hold political hustings events during local elections so that the people of Jesmond get to meet and quiz the people who will represent them. If journalists don't do it, who will?

7. Multimedia reporting can be practised by anyone.

During a partnership with the BBC and local Jesmond schools to produce slideshows and short films for Radio 3's Free Thinking festival at the Sage Gateshead, some of the best interviews were conducted by teenagers from a Jesmond school for children with severe hearing impairments. Journalists have a role to play in helping people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to tell their stories.

8. Passion and professionalism are mandatory.

JesmondLocal wouldn't happen without a handful of passionate professionals (that's me, former Newcastle University journalism students Dan Howarth, Sophie Bauckham, Nelly Stavropolous, Bob Cooper and Nathan Buck, and our chief evangelist David Baines) plus the patience of our partners, children and family pets. Sustainable journalism isn't going to develop and evolve unless more professional journalists are willing to give up time and money to pass on their reporting skills. Some journalists claim ventures like **JesmondLocal** undermine the profession? But we've also learned that there's a big difference between what we do – teaching the skills of reporting – and practicing journalism – the analysis and interpretation of facts and events. That's something that can only be learned with years of experience and practice. So professional journalists, we believe, have nothing to fear.

9. The next generation of journalists must see themselves also as educators.

Those of us who have been in the business for longer struggle with the concept of sharing our skills. But in a post-Leveson world, journalists will have to work hard to recast the relationship with the public, and become more social in their working practices. It won't be enough to be just a content creator – journalists also need to be organisers, curators, collaborators, supporters and educators.

10. We are a unique laboratory of inquiry.

Few media organisations could take the risks and leaps of faith that **JesmondLocal** ploughs into – community radio shows, pop-up magazines, journalism bootcamps - or be able to adapt and switch the focus of its inquiry as quickly when something doesn't work, or a new innovation appears. We're not afraid to take risks. We're not afraid to fail.

What's new for 2012/13?

This year our approach to hyperlocal reporting will continue to be inclusive and diverse, but we want to place a higher value on quality. One lesson we gained during last year's citizen reporting bootcamps was an increased appreciation for our own "art" of journalism. Reporting skills, we've found, can be learned in a few weeks. Becoming a journalist – someone who can sift, analyse, interpret and explain the news – is a much tougher assignment.

So this year, we want to make a distinction between reporting and journalism. That will give us the opportunity to teach and experiment in fast-paced, rough and ready mobile journalism on the one hand - and more considered, high quality journalism on the other.

During the next year, we've decided to spend the first semester learning the skills of "smartphone reporting". In the second semester, we will shift our focus to practising good quality journalism in print, audio, video and web. And in the third semester, we will examine how we can sustain and strengthen community through teaching, web and live events

Other areas we want to explore this year include:

- innovative (and profitable) ways in which our reporting/journalism might be repackaged in product or live event format
- an organisational structure that spreads responsibility to wider group of influential people from the local community, council, business, charities and educators
- replicability – can we boil down what we do to a model that would also benefit communities in, say, Byker? Or Botswana?
- securing funding/revenue streams that would enable us each year to promote one of our student volunteers to a one-year, full-time contract as editor of the **JesmondLocal** news website.

Beyond that... and true to our ethic...we're open to suggestion.

Draft schedule of activities for 2012/13

<i>Semester A</i>	<i>Smartphone reporting</i>
A1 Oct 8 th	Introduction
A2 Oct 15 th	Selection/assigning roles
A3 Oct 22 nd	News-gathering
A4 Oct 29 th	Tweeting the news
A5 Nov 12 th	Facebooking the news
A6 Nov 19 th	iPhoneography/mobile photography
A7 Nov 26 th	Filming on the fly
A8 Dec 3 rd	Video editing
A9 Dec 10 th	Live interviewing and streaming

<i>Semester B</i>	<i>Going deeper into "journalism"</i>
B1 Jan 28 th	Reassignment
B2 Feb 2 nd	Radio
B3 Feb 11 th	Print
B4 Feb 18 th	Film
B5 Feb 25 th	Photography/slideshows
B6 Mar 4 th	Investigations
B7 Mar 11 th	Opinion and comment

<i>Semester C</i>	<i>Out-of-the-box local journalism</i>
C1 Apr 14 th	Preview
C2 Apr 22 nd	Local politics
C3 Apr 29 th	Festival planning
C4 May 6 th	Training the community
C5 May 13 th	Local journalism as art
C6 May 20 th	As product
C7 May 27 th	As live performance
C8 Jun 3 rd	JesmondLocal Live
C9 Jun 10 th	Overseas development
C10 Jun 17 th	The JesmondLocal Awards

Some of our partners on previous projects:



BBC
NEWCASTLE



BALTIC



For more information, visit <http://jesmondlocal.com>

or email editor@jesmondlocal.com