

THE BABBERS RADIO SHOW

June 2015 - August 2020

A weekly community radio show run by and for people aged 50+ in Bristol

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of organisations working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them to live fulfilling lives. It is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund as part of the national Ageing Better: Fulfilling Lives programme.

The Babbers is a weekly community radio show run by and for people aged 50+ in Bristol. The show ran continuously for five years from June 2015 – August 2020, before taking a pause. **This report provides an overview of the Babbers show up until August 2020, highlighting key points of learning and recommendations** which may be useful for other radio stations, organisations and community groups within Bristol and nationally.

Overview of the Babbers show

Babbers is a weekly radio show broadcast on Ujima, a local community radio station in Bristol. As a station, Ujima aims to **celebrate diversity** (particularly African and Caribbean cultures), confront racism and **provide a platform for those whose voices are not often heard in the mainstream media**. As part of this ethos, **the Babbers show is run by and for local people aged 50+** who want to make their voices heard. The show presents a **positive portrayal of ageing and challenges stereotypes around ageism**, sending out a more positive message about what it's like to grow older in Bristol.

A group of **volunteer presenters plan and coordinate the show**, exploring issues, exposing inequalities and providing relevant information about services, events and activities. All content on the show is chosen to inform and entertain; the team create a show that they would like to listen to.

The Babbers show fits under the BAB programme theme of 'creating the conditions to reduce and prevent loneliness'. This theme is about changing attitudes, culture and policies across Bristol to encourage change that empowers older people. **BAB funded training for an initial group of volunteers and provided equipment that could be used to record outside the studio.**

The Babbers team produced a weekly show from June 2015 - August 2020 including recording from home throughout the Covid-19 lockdown. The show took a pause in August 2020 and Ujima are committed to supporting it to continue in the future. Recordings of previous shows are available at <https://www.mixcloud.com/BabbersShow/>



Successes

⇒ High quality content

The Babbers show has a **high standard of presenting**, which is particularly impressive given that the majority of the volunteer team do not have training or prior experience in this field. The show also **manages to interview a wide variety of guests**, resulting in an interesting and enjoyable show for both the listeners and the volunteers involved.

⇒ A radio show run by people aged 50+, for listeners aged 50+

The Babbers show is primarily aimed at an audience of people aged 50+ living in Bristol. Through having this target audience, the show focuses on actively **dispelling stereotypes** and having an **asset-based approach to the portrayal of growing older**. The team hope that listeners feel **empowered** by hearing someone of a similar age doing an activity that is out of their comfort zone, hopefully being **inspired to try something new** themselves. This is particularly important during Covid-19 when older people are portrayed as vulnerable and disempowered.

In addition to being entertaining, the Babbers show **provides information about activities and services** available in the city. This is **particularly important for listeners without access to the internet** and who may find it difficult to get this local information in other ways. Only a small number of radio stations have programmes specifically targeted towards an audience of listeners aged 50+.

Being run by people aged 50+ is what makes the Babbers show particularly distinctive. It gives a voice to people aged 50+, and the freedom to discuss topics that are interesting and relevant for them. Presenters aged 50+ may be more likely to understand some of the issues faced by their listeners, either through their own direct experience or through the experience of friends and peers. This can help make a show more relatable for listeners and possibly reduce the risk of them feeling patronised. The volunteers involved with the Babbers show **span a range of ages within the bracket of 50+, bringing a variety of perspectives.** Although it is led by people 50+, some younger people are also involved with the show resulting in an **intergenerational element.**

➡ Continuing throughout Covid-19

A big achievement is that the Babbers team **managed to continue producing a weekly show throughout the Covid-19 lockdown**. This was not easy; some other shows within Ujima found that they were unfortunately not able to continue during this time.

The Babbers team **adapted to a completely new way of working** during lockdown, learning how to record audio segments from home via their phone or computer. These were then assembled together by their volunteer technician, who added music and ensured the audio timings fitted around Ujima's criteria for advertisement and news breaks.

➡ The ability for people to listen back afterwards

Recordings of previous Babbers shows are available on MixCloud and the Ujima website, which works very well. This **enables the show to reach a wider audience beyond those who are able to listen to it live**. However the team **feel that this functionality is not used to its full potential**, for example guests interviewed on the show could be sent the MixCloud link afterwards, with encouragement to subscribe and share it with others in order to build up a larger audience base.



Challenges

➡ Entirely led by a small team of volunteers

A key challenge is that the Babbers show is created by a small team of volunteers, with no paid roles. **It would be useful to have a larger team of volunteers as well as some paid hours available** for a technician, an editor/producer and a project manager.

Recommended paid roles:

- **Technician** - There is a large reliance on the voluntary role of technician and their specialist knowledge; the show would not be possible without this role. This is particularly the case when recording from home during Covid-19.
- **Editor/Producer** - This role could oversee the shows and help to arrange interviews.
- **Project Manager** - This role could promote the show more widely, build up a regular listener base, gather feedback from listeners, recruit and train volunteers and ensure the show continues to offer what the community wants.

In addition to these paid roles, it would also be useful to have a larger team of volunteers involved with the Babbers show. **Volunteers could then work in small groups to carry out the different functions of the show**, including promoting the show more widely and gathering feedback from listeners. However high drop-out rates mean that this is very challenging.

➡ Volunteer drop-out

The Babbers show started with a large team of volunteers but **experienced high drop-out rates**. This occurred for a variety of reasons including:

- **Personal reasons** - for example moving away from Bristol.
- **Loss of interest** - deciding that community radio was not something they were interested in.
- **Put off by the time commitment** - not being able or willing to volunteer for the number of hours that some of the roles required.
- **Put off by the level of responsibility** - wishing to contribute but not be responsible for producing the whole show.

When volunteers drop out, the remaining volunteers put time and energy into promoting the show and finding new ones. This is **time-consuming to do in addition to their own role** within the team, and **emotionally exhausting if these new volunteers then later drop out**. It also means that the existing volunteers often have to put more time towards the show until new volunteers are found. **For this reason it would work well for the recruitment and training of new volunteers to fit into the role of a paid project manager.**

Lack of listener information and interaction

Community radio stations are **not able to obtain data about the number of people who listen live** to each show, which means the Babbers show has **limited information about its listeners**. MixCloud records the number of times a show is played, which provides the team with information about how many people listen to the show via this method, however **this lack of information about live listeners can be frustrating and demotivating for those involved**.

In addition to not knowing the number of listeners, the Babbers show also has a **limited ability for audience interaction**. The show has an email address and Facebook page, however they **do not have their own phone number** which presents challenges for those listeners without access to the internet. One purpose of the show is to provide listeners who are not online with information about activities and services, however not being contactable via the phone makes it challenging for any listeners who miss the details of an activity. The Babbers team would like a phone number for listeners to ring in order to have any of the details repeated.

Similarly, having the option of a **listener phone-in feature live on air would increase the possibility for interaction** within the show. However unfortunately the Ujima studio does not have the mechanisms to offer this.

This limited amount of listener information and interaction makes it very **difficult for the Babbers team to tailor the show to the audience** or know what they find enjoyable.

Limited interaction with other Ujima radio shows

The Babbers team have very **little interaction with the volunteers involved in other Ujima radio shows**. The nature of radio means that this interaction is less likely to happen naturally; when volunteers are not based at the studio, they come into the studio for their live show and then leave again afterwards. However it would be **valuable to have more opportunities for the volunteers on different shows to meet each other to share learning and ideas**.

Diversity of the Babbers team

There is a **lack of diversity within the team of Babbers volunteers**. The team have attempted to improve this diversity in many different ways over the course of the show, but have had limited success.

A diverse range of guests contribute to the show (for example through being interviewed) and there is a lot of potential for this to be expanded, particularly through the newer 'Babbers Dreams' feature. However **this diversity has not then followed through to the volunteer team**.

Reasons for this include:

- As a community radio station, Ujima have strong links with the Malcolm X Elders Forum, a community group for people aged 50+ from BAME backgrounds, predominantly Black African and Caribbean. Unfortunately, the **weekly meeting for the Malcolm X Elders Forum occurs at the same time that the Babbers show is live on air** which makes it difficult for members to be regularly involved with the live radio shows. The Babbers team have however pre-recorded audio with some of these individuals, but it hinders their involvement as regular volunteers.
- In addition to the Malcolm X Elders Forum the Babbers team have also tried to engage with other BAME community groups but, **being entirely run by volunteers, they are not able to do this to the extent that they would like**. Having a paid role would improve the ability of the team to reach a diverse range of volunteers.
- The volunteer role involves a large number of hours and level of responsibility, which makes it **a difficult role to fill and leads to volunteer drop-out**.
- In order to move beyond having a diverse range of guests, to having a diverse volunteer team, the show **may need to seek out individuals who have a deeper interest in radio, communications and coordination**. Many people are happy to speak on the show once or twice but are **not interested in the behind-the-scenes preparation and coordination** that is involved. Different promotional strategies are therefore needed to try to achieve a diverse range of volunteers compared to having a diverse range of guests.



Learning related to the Covid-19 lockdown

The Babbers team **continued to produce the show throughout the Covid-19 lockdown by independently recording audio from home**. At the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown the Babbers volunteer team shared their own experiences of lockdown and their advice for others. This was valuable at the start, however the team soon needed to adapt the content so that it included other features.

They found it **worked well to have regular contributors for these features**, for example 'Kerry's Corner', 'Babbers Dreams', a fortnightly gardening club, an interview by Tony and a short story. The fortnightly gardening club involved two regular guest contributors who were experienced gardeners and older people themselves.

Each of these contributors recorded their own audio to fit the time slot available. **Setting a schedule for each show in advance** meant that the contributors usually knew which section would follow their one and **could introduce the next feature**. This helped the show to flow smoothly rather than feeling disjointed.

Some of the Babbers volunteers preferred doing these pre-recorded shows, whereas others preferred the live shows recorded in the studio. **Interviews could still take place via video conference** when recording from home, however this **requires both the interviewer and interviewee to have access to this technology and feel confident using it**. The nature of recording independently from home means that, unless the feature is an interview, it necessarily **ends up being a monologue**. Some of the volunteers also found that recording from home **required more time than it did in the studio** (for example because they wished to re-record over a mistake) and could be **more stressful**.

Once radio stations are able to record live in the studio again, it would be **valuable to continue offering their contributors the option of pre-recording the audio if they wish**. This may be more appealing for some individuals and it would be possible for shows to have a mixture of live and pre-recorded content.



Babbers' recommendations for others

1 Find out what the community wants

Before you start, **ask the community what they would like** from a radio show. Do they want something serious or light-hearted? Find your own niche without duplicating anything that already exists – what is your show offering that listeners can't get from somewhere else? Who is your primary audience? It is also important to **regularly check in with the community** to ensure the show continues to offer what they want, instead of continuing with something simply because it has always been done that way.

If your show has a primary audience of people aged 50+, remember that this is a large age category which contains many different generations. Generations within this age band will have had very different experiences throughout life; there **might therefore be generational as well as individual differences in listeners' preferences**. Similarly, it **may be that working status** (retired, part-time or full-time employment) can generate bigger differences in listeners' interests than age does.

2 Paid hours in addition to volunteers

Have some **regular paid hours available in addition to your team of volunteers**. These paid hours could cover the functions of producer/editor, project manager and technician. **Think creatively about how to source this funding** (and what the radio station allows), for example one option might be for the show to be commercially sponsored.

Anticipate and plan for a certain drop-out rate among volunteers (for example ensuring there are a relatively large number of volunteers involved at any one time), while also taking steps to reduce this drop-out through training, support and the structure of the volunteer role (see point 6). The **length of the radio show is another aspect to consider** in order to reduce volunteer drop-out; a two-hour show requires a large time commitment from volunteers and it might be that a one-hour show is more manageable. **Whatever the time commitment, be upfront about this** with volunteers so that they can make a more informed decision about being involved.

3 Proactively build up a listener base

Reflect on how you will build up a listener base and encourage individuals to become regular listeners. One method is to **use interviews as a way to inform people about the show**, and 'hook' in certain communities. **Send the 'listen again' link to everyone you interview and encourage them to share it with others** in their network. If there will be a specific topic for an upcoming show, plan this far enough in advance in order to tell listeners about it and promote it to groups or organisations who may be particularly interested.

4 Develop relationships with local groups and organisations

Local groups and organisations are likely to value having another avenue of disseminating information about their activities and services. **Spend time building relationships with these groups and develop a system where they regularly submit this information to you** without you having to spend time finding it.

5 Encourage listener feedback and interaction

Ensure you **have the facilities for listeners to contact you, and encourage this interaction**. This should include a **phone line for those who do not have access to the internet**. If possible, choose a studio which has the facilities for **live phone-ins** while you are on air in order to have conversations with listeners.

6 Training, support and structure of the volunteer role

Offer a **programme of training for volunteers**, for example to ensure they feel confident using any technology involved. However keep in mind that, **even after training, volunteers may still feel nervous and out of their comfort zone**; even people who are usually confident with public speaking often feel nervous about being live on air.

It is therefore important to offer **other forms of ongoing support** as well, for example **regular volunteer team meetings**. These team meetings work well when they can be held face-to-face and include an honest discussion about any challenges people are facing within the role and support they would like. Informal support arises when those involved feel like part of a team, so spend time facilitating this and **encouraging more informal social opportunities**.

Allow volunteers to do as much or as little as they would like, while also providing opportunities for them to **gradually build up their participation and confidence step-by-step**. The role of presenter can be particularly daunting, and some volunteers may not wish to do it at first but may grow into this role over time. **Confidence can be built by working in pairs (for example as co-hosts) or small teams** focusing on one area of the show (for example promotion), thereby sharing the workload and bouncing ideas off each other. However a larger team of volunteers is needed in order to be able to do this.

7 Diversity

Take proactive steps towards having **diversity within the team of volunteers, as well as within the content and guests featured on the show.** For example, if the studio is not accessible for people with certain disabilities, what could be done to overcome this? How could the show be done differently so that all roles are still available to an individual?

A show's **diversity can change over time due to factors such as volunteer drop-out,** and it's therefore important to put **structures in place to ensure diversity is considered on a regular basis** and that you keep trying to reflect the whole community.



Impact of the Babbers show

➡ Impact on the volunteers involved

The Babbers volunteers feel they have experienced a range of positive impacts from being involved with the show. These include:

A sense of achievement at creating something which made a positive contribution to the community.

Meeting a wide variety of different people, including guests and fellow volunteers.

Developing friendships with the other volunteers.

Pride at being able to ask the 'right' questions which encourage guests to open up and communicate what they want to say.

Feeling more involved with the local community and aware of the activities and services available in Bristol.

Great fun.

Enjoyment from being able to share music and features with listeners who may not have heard them before.

Regular reflection on what matters to other people, seeing things from other perspectives.

Increased awareness of how a radio show is created and an appreciation of the amount of time it requires.

Learning lots of new skills as well as using existing ones. Some volunteers have gained confidence and skills on the Babbers show and moved on to other roles within the field of radio.

Renewed respect for people who give a lot of time for the community.

Impact on Ujima

The Babbers show has a positive impact on Ujima as a radio station. **It informs the way that Ujima works**, for example by raising their awareness of the most appropriate language to use when talking about ageing (e.g. 'older people' instead of 'elderly'). **It also encourages the other Ujima radio shows to be more intergenerational and include perspectives from people of all ages.**

The Babbers show **brings issues to Ujima's attention that they may not have otherwise considered.** One clear example of this is the narrative of older people being 'vulnerable', something particularly prevalent during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Babbers team dismantled this narrative and helped Ujima to recognize how frustrating and damaging this portrayal of older people can be. This impact has been an inspiration for Ujima.

Impact on listeners

Minimal audience interaction and limited information about the number of listeners makes it challenging for the Babbers team to know what listeners enjoy and the impact it has on them.

A survey was launched during July 2020 to try to gather this feedback. The survey was open for three weeks and could be completed online or over the phone. There were two strands to the survey promotion:

- 1)** Those already at least partially engaged with the show. This included announcements on the show and on Babbers social media.
- 2)** Other people in Bristol aged 50+ who may or may not be aware of the show. This was achieved through promotion to the members of Friends Ageing Better and Bristol Older People's Forum.

21 people completed this survey, of which:

Age: The largest age category was 65 - 74 years old (48%). The second largest age category was 75 - 84 years old (24%).

Gender: 76% of respondents were female, and 24% were male.

Ethnic group: The majority of respondents were White or White British (81%).

Of these 21 respondents:

2 were regular listeners (every week).

3 were occasional listeners.

16 did not listen to the show: Of these, 2 were busy while the show was live and did not know how to listen back, 10 were not previously aware of the show, and 4 did not wish to listen to the show.

When asked **what they liked or disliked about having a radio show mainly aimed at people aged 50+**, 12 respondents provided feedback:

- 6 people responded positively to the Babbers show having this target audience but did not expand upon why.
- 3 people liked that this was the target audience because it could challenge stereotypes of older people.
- 1 person referred to the show feeling relatable because of shared experiences with the listener.
- 1 person felt it was important for the show to include young people in the discussions too.
- 1 person raised the importance of recognising that 50+ is a very large age bracket.

When asked **what they liked or disliked about having a radio show run by volunteers aged 50+**, 10 respondents provided feedback.

- 3 people felt that this would make it easier for listeners to relate to the presenters.
- 2 people liked having volunteers from this age group but did not expand upon why.
- 2 people said they would also be happy with a variety of ages if the individual understood the needs and desires of older generations.
- 1 person liked this because it challenged stereotypes of older people.
- 1 person raised the need to have volunteers from a variety of ages within the 50+ bracket.
- 1 person liked this because many other radio shows are led by young people.





The Babbers Show

<https://www.ujimaradio.com/show/the-babbers-show/>

Bristol Ageing Better

www.bristolageingbetter.org.uk

bab@ageukbristol.org.uk

0117 928 1539

Further BAB learning resources can be found at:

<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-so-far/>

