This is a practice-based research project combining digital storytelling and community-led filmmaking workshops. The pilot-phase community project involved a series of 10 self-contained workshops where PI Tina Gharavi worked with a focus groups of ten young people, aged 15-19, at risk of offending or who have experienced the prisons system. Focus-group participants were identified by project partner NACRO, national crime reduction charity and media charity Bridge + Tunnel Voices.

Utilising a prototype of an interactive digital storytelling platform, the project explored how young people respond to and engage with filmic material of a social issue focus, which was accessible through the platform. A series of media production training sessions were held to ensure the technological tool was accessible by all group members. Participants were encouraged to produce original content inspired by the material shown to them, as the project aimed to capture the creative agency demonstrated by participants as well as the act of empowerment and democratic participation through creative expression.

“The Change the Story project has enabled NACRO to provide its learners with an opportunity to express their story in a way that they can relate and that is relevant to their peers. Young people feel empowered by the opportunity and feel it is giving them a voice. Thank you!” - Chris Homans (Youth Manager, NACRO)
The community engagement work, funded by Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal was completed with great success as it managed to accomplish key three objectives: a) train young learners who are restricted by formal education in filmmaking production, allowing them to produce short films and engage in discussions and film screenings; b) test and provide a teaching model that empowers beneficiaries by allowing them to share their stories through filmmaking and feel empowered and proud of their own achievements; c) exemplify the power of film and digital tools in communicating unheard and often neglected social issues and demonstrate its power in raising awareness and allowing social excluded groups to voice their opinions.

This project allowed Dr Tina Gharavi to work with a hard-to-reach community group and to test and evaluate the role of digital technologies and creative production, in facilitating participation and accomplishing self-empowerment. All project participants exemplified significant changes in mental and social well-being, recognised their talents, exemplified ownership of their work, and worked both as part of a team but also on their own initiative. Furthermore, this project has succeeded in involving young people in leadership, decision-making and social digital storytelling, allowing them to defend their opinions. It has also explored the impact of digital storytelling and the way it can serve as an arena for young individual to express, often publicly dismissed stories about themselves and their lives.

“My entire life has gained meaning now... it gave me a future to go for”

Tony, 17, project participant