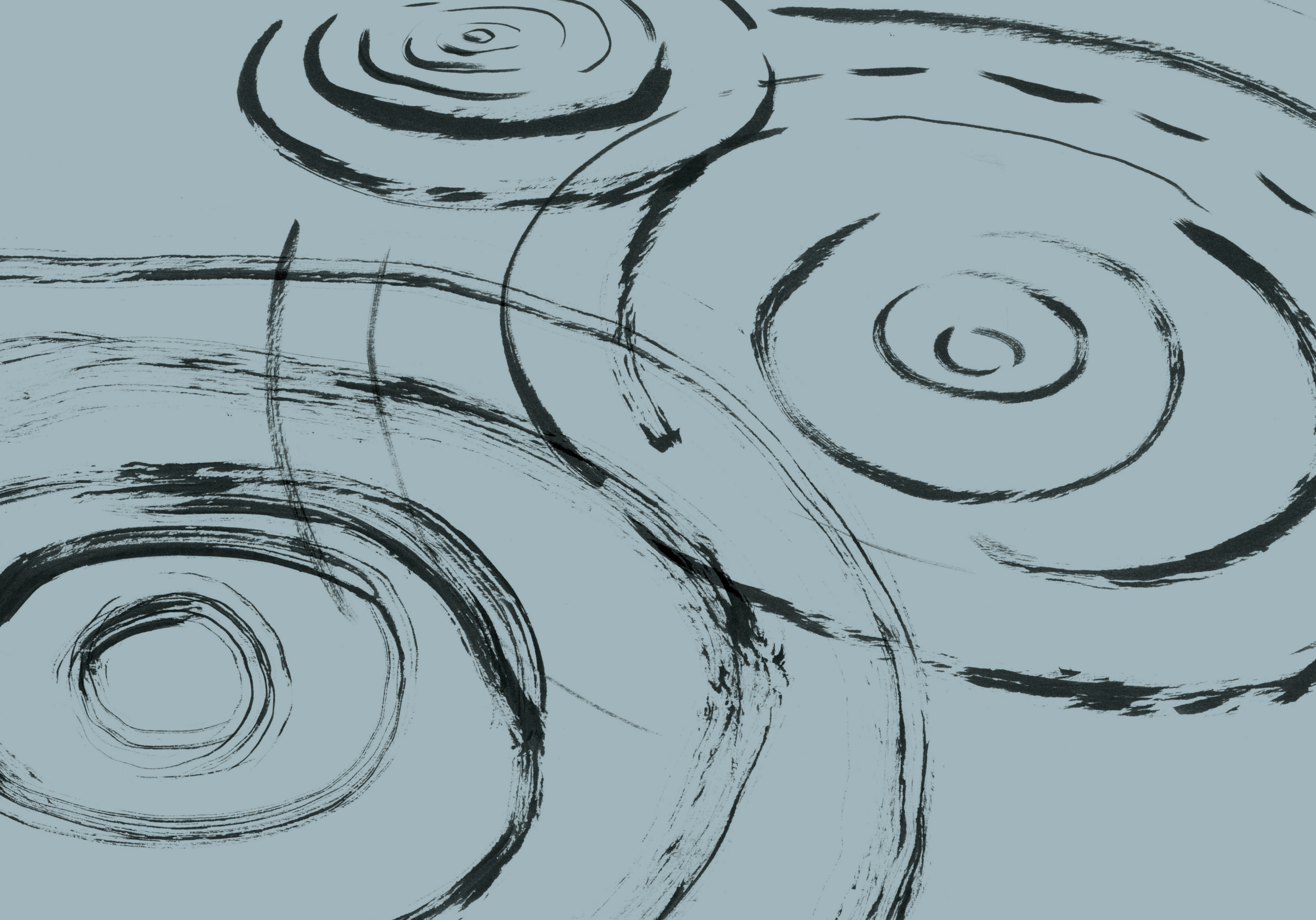




PEBBLES & RIPPLES

Small acts of inclusive research that reshape entire systems



INSTITUTIONAL ENDORSEMENT

Pebbles and Ripples is a joyful, imaginative, and deeply meaningful contribution to Lancaster University's evolving research culture.

I congratulate everyone involved in bringing this graphic novel to life - from the project leads and researchers to the talented creative team whose artistry has made complex ideas accessible, engaging and fun. This work exemplifies what is possible when we embrace creativity as a catalyst for cultural change.

Grounded in the pillars of sustainability, ethics and inclusion, Pebbles and Ripples captures not only what we do as a research community, but who we aspire to be. It reminds us that research is never a solitary act: each insight, each decision and each act of courage is a pebble we cast into a wider pond. The ripples touch colleagues, communities and future generations in ways we may never fully see, but which matter profoundly.

As an institution, we remain firmly committed to building a research culture that is equitable, ethical, vibrant and inclusive. This novel arrives at exactly the right moment. As higher education navigates uncertainty, here is a creative, hopeful and honest invitation to imagine and to act differently. It reflects our belief that meaningful change happens in community, through collaboration and with the humility and generosity that the African philosophy of Ubuntu teaches us: We are all interconnected.

My hopeful action for readers is simple: let this work inspire you. Consider what pebbles you can cast, be they small or large, to strengthen our culture of inclusion, deepen our ethical commitments and support more sustainable ways of doing research. Share it with colleagues, discuss it in teams and let its lessons ripple outward into your work, your decisions and your communities.

To everyone who contributed to Pebbles and Ripples: thank you. Your work has created something joyful, thoughtful and transformative. May its ripples travel far.

*Professor Kendi Guantai
Dean for Culture and Inclusion
Lancaster University*

THE VALUE OF REIMAGINING RESEARCH PRACTICES

Academic research has as many shapes and forms as there are disciplines and as there are combinations of these interrogating and seeking to solve particular problems. Research practices change over time in line with new socio-economic conditions, shifting political contexts, new technological developments, emerging cultural trends, new scientific discoveries, and more. The questions historians asked of, for example, public health, space exploration or environmental change in the 1960s are different from those asked in 2026, which will, in turn, differ from related questions asked in 2070 and beyond. Research practices adjust over time, though not always do we sit and reflect on what that means for our own academic and professional endeavours as educators, researchers, practitioners, and citizens.

Funded as part of the Wellcome Trust's Institutional Funding for Research Culture, Reimagining Research Practices: Towards a Sustainable, Ethical and Inclusive Future is a two-year project (2024-26) contributing to understand what achieving net zero by 2035 means for Lancaster University's research culture. Structured around the three pillars of sustainability, ethics and inclusion, we have researched our internal practices in these three areas; have developed resources which will inform institutional strategies and policies now and in the near future; and will evaluate our findings so that these and relevant examples of best practice are shared across the sector.

As part of the environmental sustainability pillar, we have focused on the environmental costs of research itself, including the tensions this creates for those advocating action on climate change and biodiversity loss. We explored current practices across universities aimed at reducing the footprint of research across disciplines and developed educational tools to support more sustainable researcher behaviours. This work highlighted how sustainability frequently intersects with ethical and inclusion concerns and included a critical analysis of how UK universities communicate sustainability through formal reporting. We also considered the implications of emerging technologies, including AI, and noted how institutional sustainability practices related to international partnerships might be linked to colonial pasts and the historical legacies of trade and exploration.

As part of the ethics pillar, we developed a range of formal and informal activities to engage the Lancaster community and wider audiences in reflecting on ethical challenges across diverse research contexts. These included Cuppa Conundrums: informal, discussion-based sessions designed to prompt dialogue around contemporary issues in research and academia, which have since been delivered at other universities and international conferences. We also produced a podcast series exploring ethical tensions in research and delivered a full-day Dataveillance Workshop examining data privacy, digital profiling, and the ethics of using personal digital data. Alongside this, we developed the DECIDE Framework, which supports ethical reflection and discussion at all stages of the research process, particularly in digitally mediated research environments.

As part of the inclusion pillar, we mapped the research taking place across the university's four faculties identifying the work with communities that are variously defined as marginalised, disadvantaged, and underrepresented. Through a series of interviews and focus groups, we distilled key learning points and challenges relating to inclusion which we believe are valuable to all researchers in all disciplines. We also developed a Community Research Digital Toolkit (CREDIT) designed to provide information and inspiration for researchers aiming to involve and engage communities in their research; and explored the use of the micro:bit as an accessible, low-cost research tool that enables wider participation through user-friendly, low-code interfaces.

This graphic novel, 'Pebbles and Ripples', became a unique vehicle to reflect on and capture some of the most salient lessons from the university's research culture and practices. Using inclusion as a springboard and connecting to questions around ethics, sustainability, places, communities, and more, the stories below provide only a small sample of where and how is our research seeking to if not already making a positive difference. The stories also provide a reflection on the challenges, discoveries, and insights that pressing for change involves.

How important having reached net zero by 2035 will be for Lancaster University is for the future readers of this novel to tell. The novel itself is our pebble. How many and how far will the ripples reach is a mixture of recognising the impactful work of colleagues and the hope that by strengthening the university's research culture we will face the challenges that the higher education in the UK is experiencing in constructive and supportive ways.

Carlos López Galviz, Yingnian Tao, Nuri Kwon, Philip Barker, Catriona Gold, and the RRP team

Lancaster, 2026

Reimagining Research Practices: Towards a Sustainable, Ethical and Inclusive Future is a project funded by The Wellcome Trust '228123/Z/23/Z'

Pebbles and Ripples is an artist commission funded by the RRP project.

Arc Studio are the writers and illustrators. Angie Phillips and Phoebe Halstead, a creative duo making illustration and animation to tell stories that move.

Lancaster University | Wellcome Trust | RRP | Arc Studio

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to all the participants who generously shared their time, experiences, and expertise to support this research:

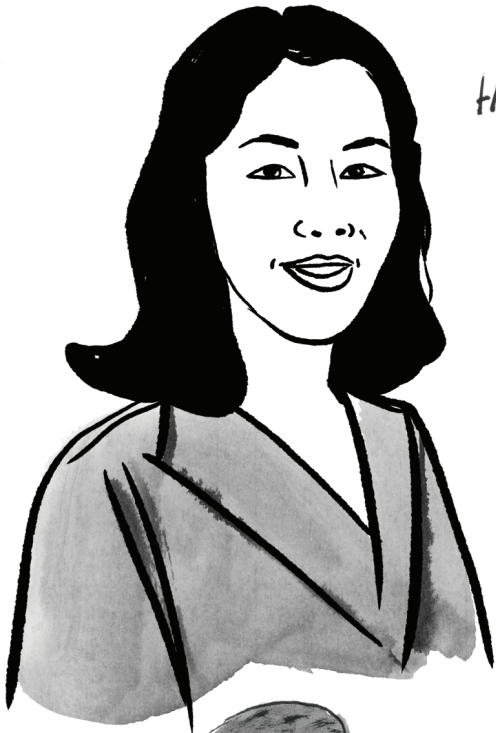
Sophie Alkhaled
Charlotte Baker
Rachael Barrow
Oliver Bates
Dakshina De Silva
Temidayo Eseonu
Alexandra Gormally-Sutton
Judith Harwin
Rachel Isba
Buket Kara
Joanna Kostka
Michael Lambert
Judith Lunn
Alice Martin
Gynna Millán
Alison Stowell
David Perez Ojeda
Sheila Payne
Cami Rowe

We also extend our thanks to the additional 17 researchers whose contributions during interviews and focus groups were equally valuable.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the academic staff and colleagues who helped us build connections with participants and facilitated the process of engaging with this diverse research community.



Dedicated to the eternal memory of Elaine Sykes, from all her friends at Lancaster University - the pebbles you pitched during your time with us continue to ripple through all our thoughts and our work.



Hi! I'm Nuri Kwon

For the past few years I've been working with a group of researchers on the Reimagining Research Practices project at Lancaster University.

We've been examining what inclusive and community-centred research looks like, the challenges and values it involves.

Meet the team -



Becky Gordon



Prof. Mark Levine



Prof. Carlos Lopez-Galviz



Dr. Richard Philpot



Dr. Seth Robinson



Dr. Heather Shaw



Prof. Phil Barker



Dr. Dan Craddock



Glen Dobson



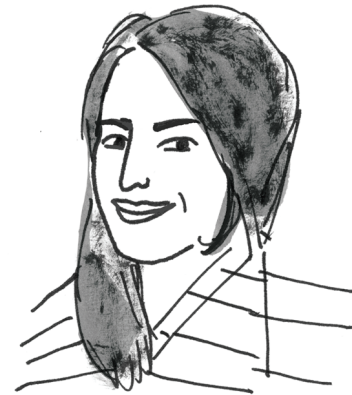
Dr. Valerie Seymour



Elaine Sykes



Dr. Samuel Finnerty



Cat Gold



Dr. Yingnian Tao

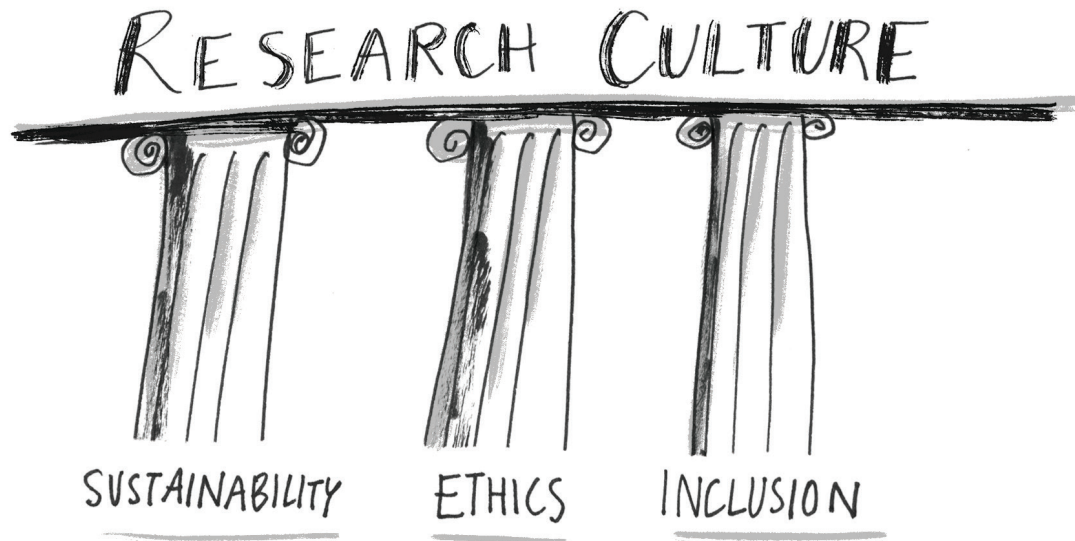


Dr. John Vidler



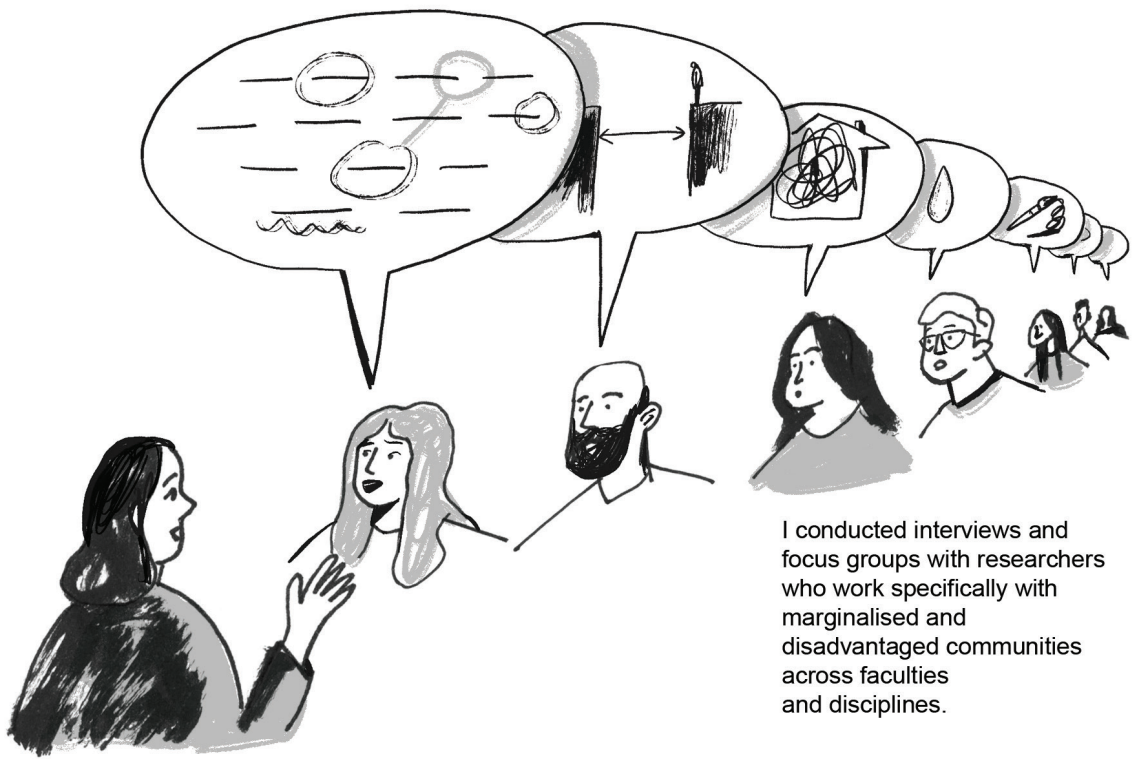
Louise Zambianchi

We are exploring research culture under 3 pillars



I've been examining what inclusive and community-centred research looks like,

the challenges and values it involves, and how inclusion connects with the other pillars.



I conducted interviews and focus groups with researchers who work specifically with marginalised and disadvantaged communities across faculties and disciplines.

This comic will give you a glimpse into some of those many stories. By presenting the approaches from multiple disciplines, we can learn from them and explore what inclusion means for different communities and in different areas of work.



The aim was to understand and explore the researchers' inclusive and meaningful practices, as well as their approaches to public engagement.

Through these conversations I've gained insights into the challenges they face while carrying out inclusive research right through the process.



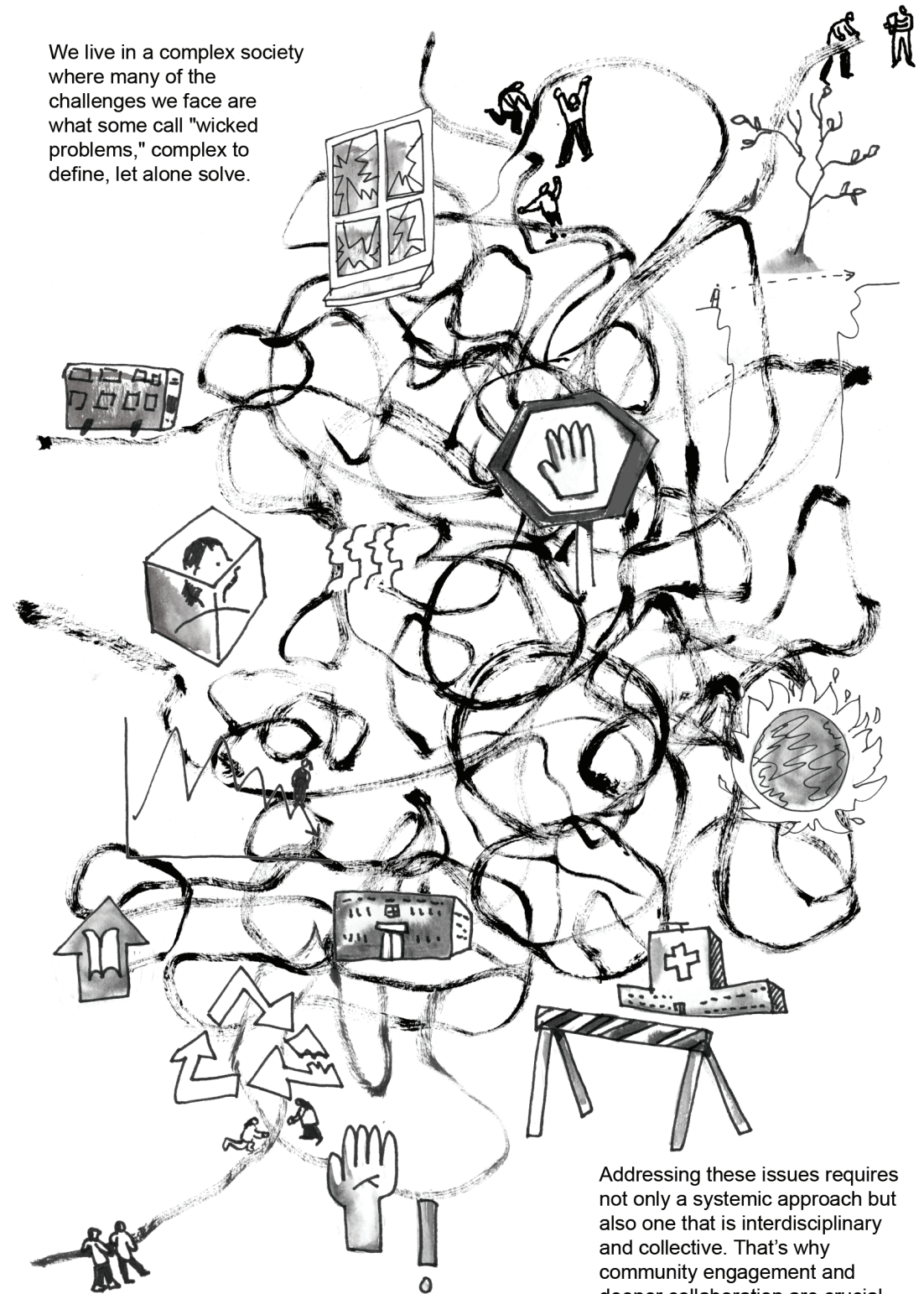
Explored the motivations that drive researchers' engagement with communities.



I heard inspiring stories, learned about the opportunities they encounter and the value for communities engaging with research.



We live in a complex society where many of the challenges we face are what some call "wicked problems," complex to define, let alone solve.



Addressing these issues requires not only a systemic approach but also one that is interdisciplinary and collective. That's why community engagement and deeper collaboration are crucial.

The process of conducting this work with academic researchers reminds me of the story of the blind men and the elephant.

In the story, a group of blind people, who had never known an elephant, try to understand it by touching different parts of its body.

Similarly, when we try to make sense of complex social phenomena like marginalisation and exclusion on our own, we risk seeing only a part of the picture.



One feels the trunk,

another the tail,



another the leg,



and each comes away with a different understanding.



Their insights are valid, but only partial.



That's why coming together, sharing perspectives, experiences and stories, is so important. It's through collective understanding that we can approach these challenges in a more meaningful, transformative way.

AN OVERVIEW OF KEY CHALLENGES

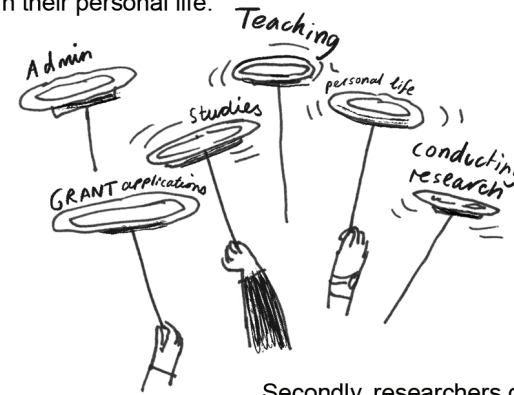
Through the interviews, a series of challenges emerged that stand in the way of researchers working in truly inclusive ways.

These barriers are faced by researchers both as individuals and as part of a wider system.

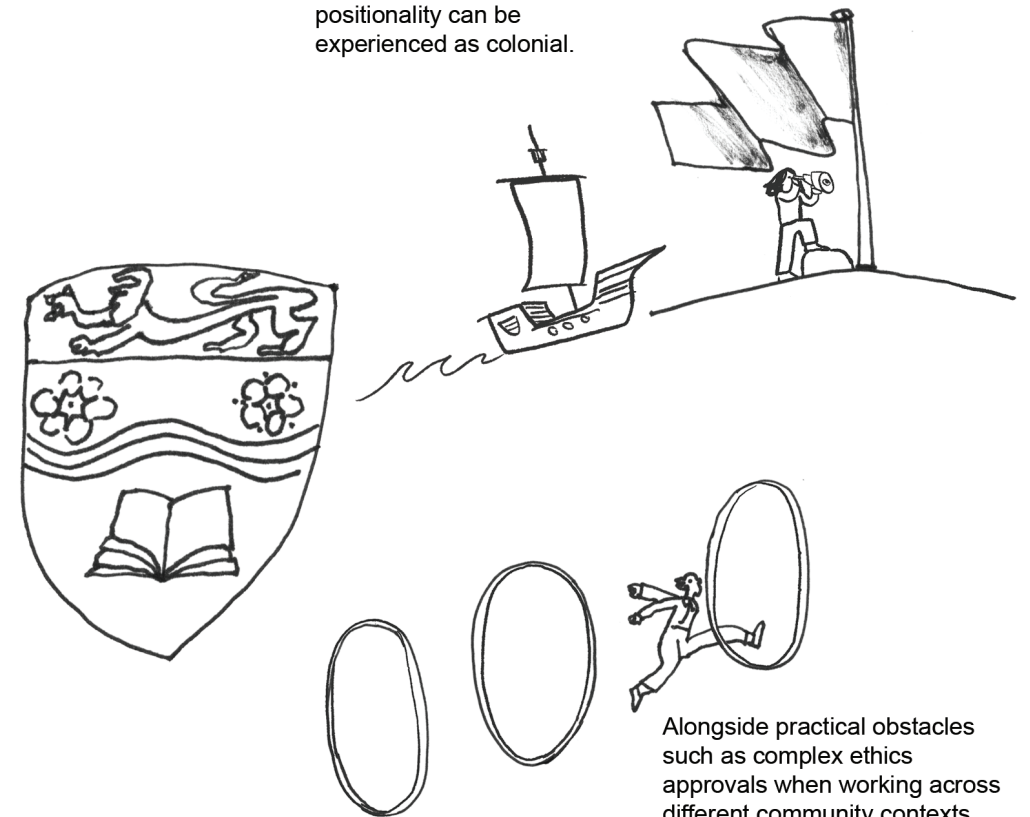


First, I discovered that researchers face a significant dilemma balancing limited time and resources. They are under pressure to meet deadlines while also needing to invest time in engaging with communities and building meaningful relationships.

Researchers have many plates to spin. With limited time, they must write grants, carry out studies, and maintain their personal life.



Secondly, researchers described several institutional barriers, including how the university's positionality can be experienced as colonial.



Building a meaningful presence in communities requires spending time there, yet postdoctoral and early career researchers are hired on 1-5 year contracts, arriving and leaving before relationships can fully develop.

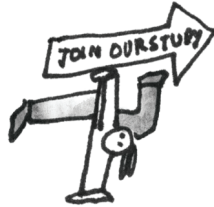
Alongside practical obstacles such as complex ethics approvals when working across different community contexts and rigid reimbursement processes that can discourage community involvement.

Third, there can be mistrust within communities toward researchers and research institutions shaped by previous experiences of feeling excluded, unheard or misrepresented.



Fourth, recruiting participants can be particularly challenging when working with marginalised groups, especially where there are no well-established or formalised communities.

The definition of “community” is blurred. Who defines it? Is it defined by those who identify as part of it? As the world constantly changes and is reshaped, new communities continue to form.



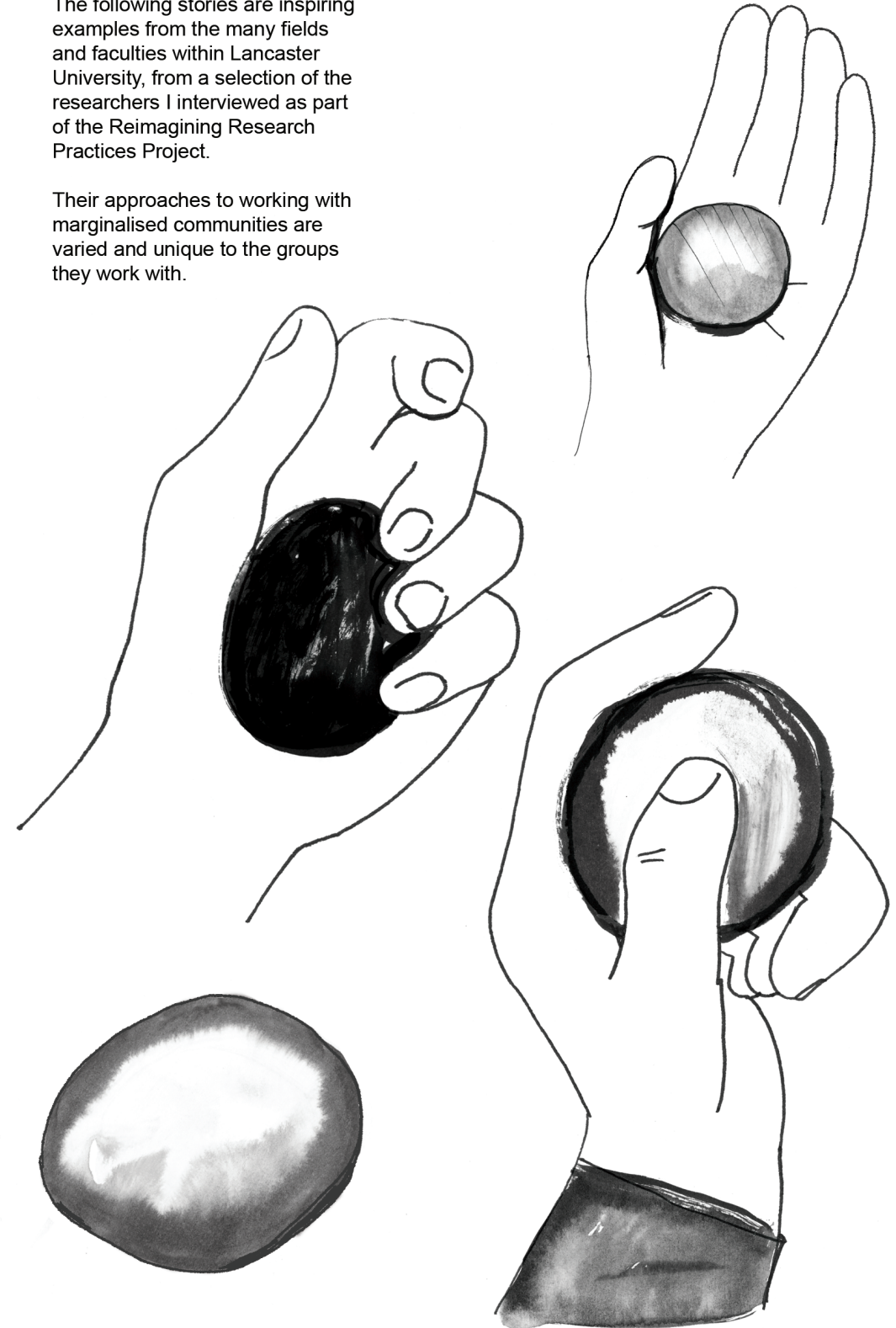
For example, technological developments can unintentionally deepen marginalisation by creating new forms of exclusion. These groups may not resemble a community in a traditional sense, with no organisation supporting them.



It becomes difficult to determine whether a clearly defined “community” exists at all, and how researchers can meaningfully identify and engage those most affected.

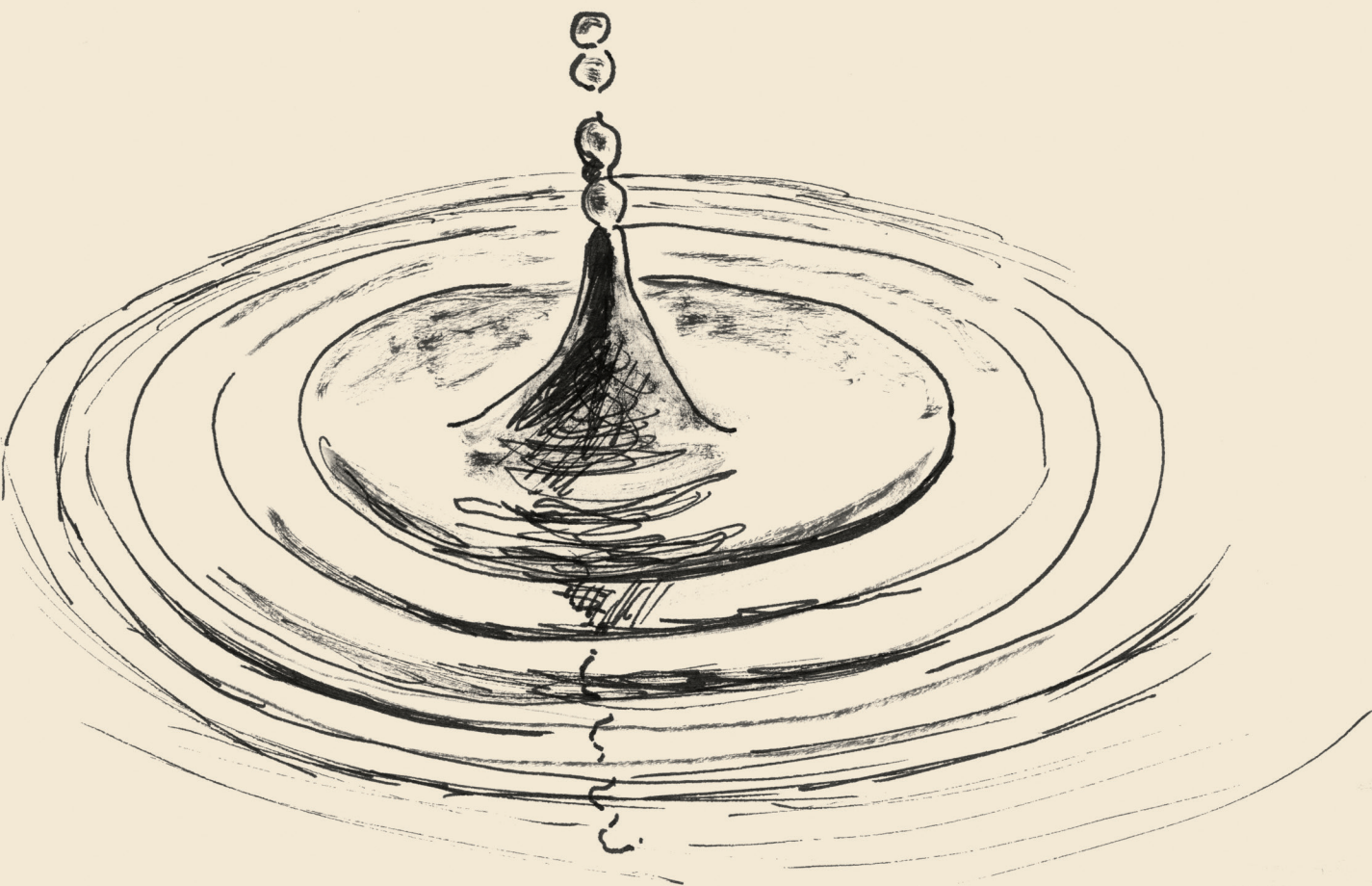
The following stories are inspiring examples from the many fields and faculties within Lancaster University, from a selection of the researchers I interviewed as part of the Reimagining Research Practices Project.

Their approaches to working with marginalised communities are varied and unique to the groups they work with.



People With Albinism

Charlotte Baker

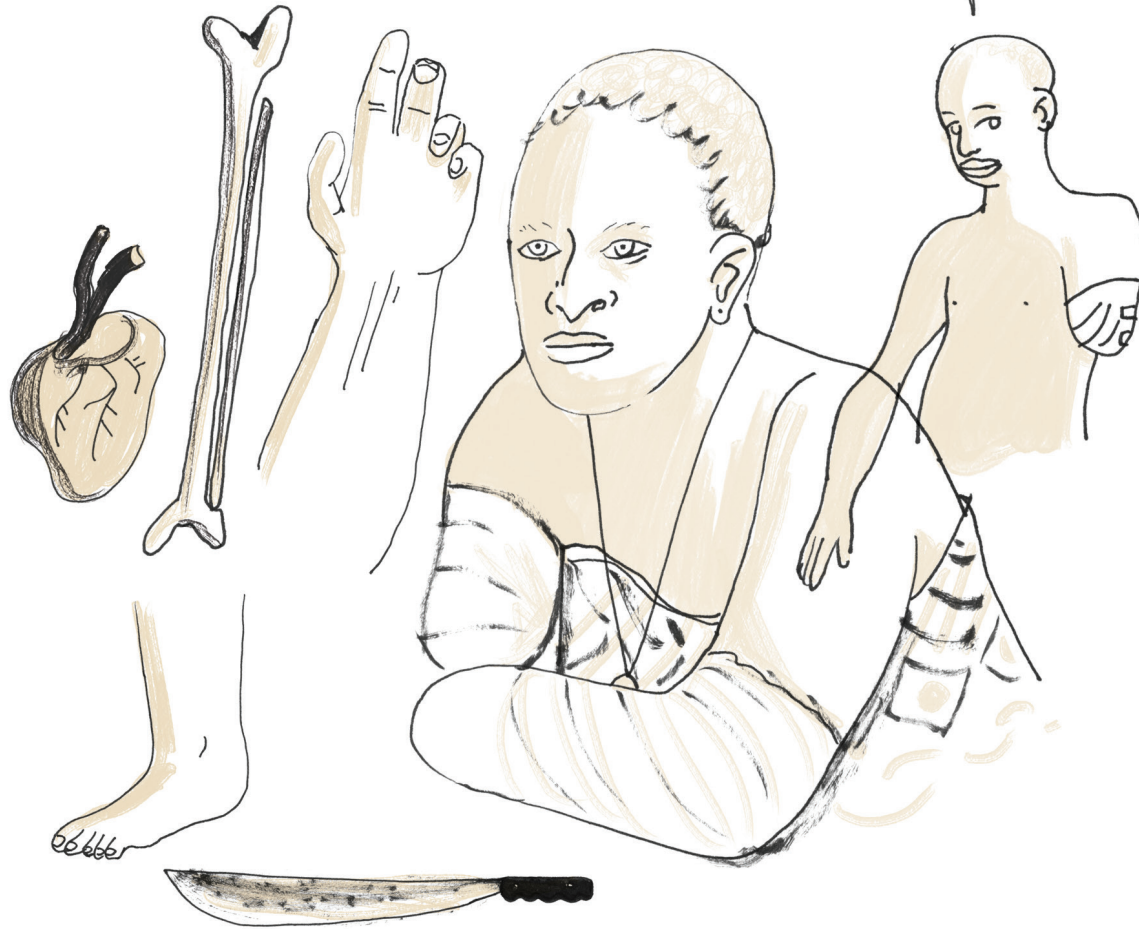


CHARLOTTE BAKER

When news broke in 2007 that people with albinism were being attacked for their body parts, I knew I couldn't just write about literary representation. I had been studying Francophone and African literature.



BREAKING NEWS: ATTACKS ON LIVE



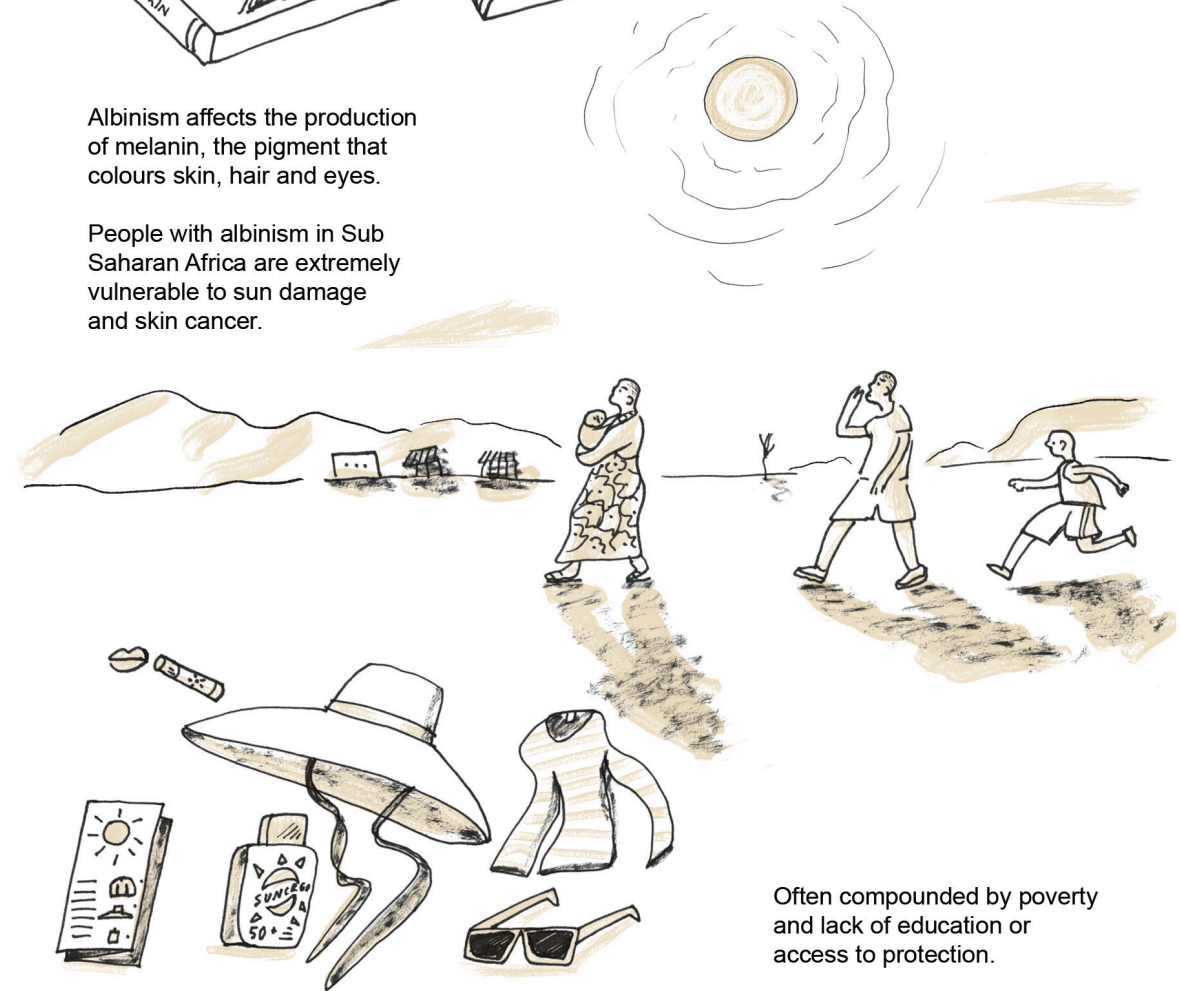
TO DATE: 600 PEOPLE WITH ALBINISM HAVE BEEN ATTACKED IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA.

My PhD explored depictions of albinism in novels, but the reality people were facing demanded more than literary analysis.



Albinism affects the production of melanin, the pigment that colours skin, hair and eyes.

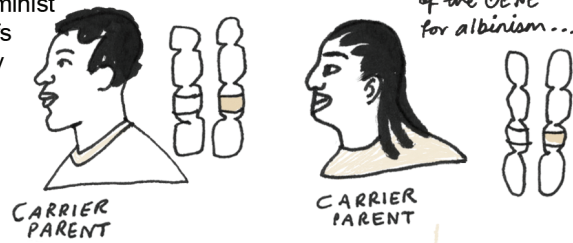
People with albinism in Sub Saharan Africa are extremely vulnerable to sun damage and skin cancer.



Often compounded by poverty and lack of education or access to protection.

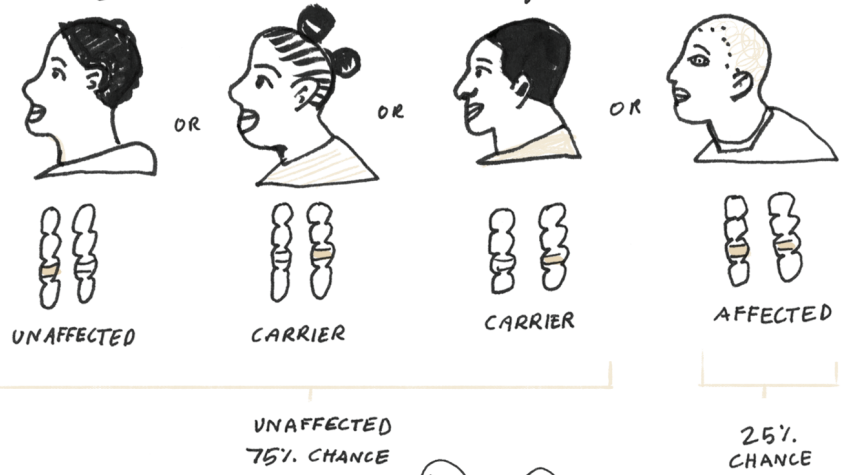
Many face conflicting explanations of their disability. Alongside the medical determinist explanation, traditional beliefs about the causes of disability remain prevalent across Sub-Saharan Africa.

When parents are carriers of the GENE for albinism...

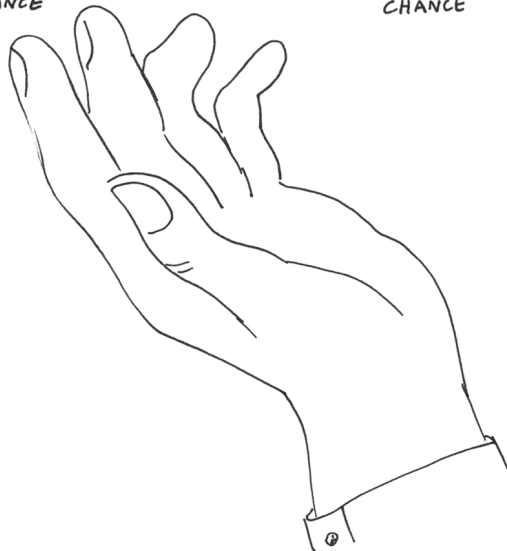


their baby receives ONE copy of the gene from each parent.

This baby will have one of the following combinations of genes:



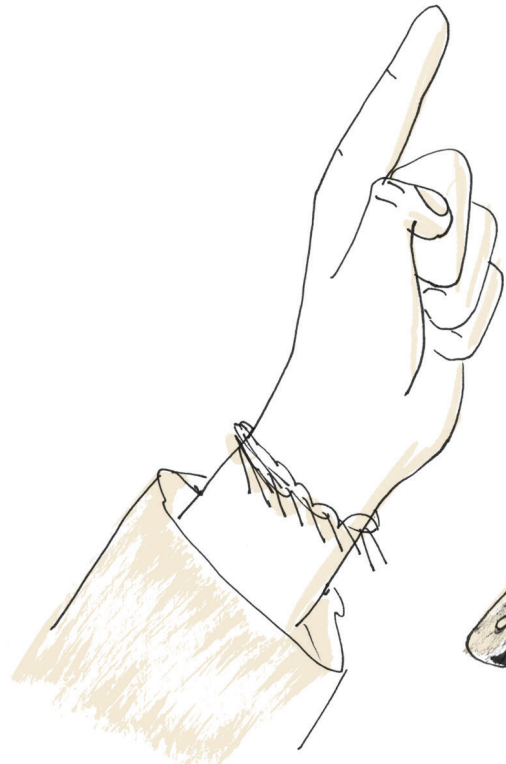
Medical determinist beliefs accept the explanations of modern medicine about the causes of disabilities. This approach often views disability as something to be treated or ameliorated.



Another set of explanations is linked to traditional animism. This carries beliefs that disabilities are punishments for bad deeds, or the result of witchcraft. Christian fatalism holds that disability is God's will.



We're not challenging people's belief in witchcraft. We're challenging the harmful aspects.



There is a human rights aspect to it, their body parts are believed to be valuable for witchcraft, there's an international trade in body parts.

I set up the Albinism in Africa Network to bring people together, later working with the UN to eliminate these practices, even going on to achieve policy change.



From 2020-2024 we ran a project focused on disability inclusion in Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa.

Our workshops used art: drawing, poetry, performance, photography.

Art became a bridge into conversations that are often too hard to start.

I was really surprised by how open people have been talking about their experiences.



Generally these workshops are led by local research partners. I went along and sat in on a workshop in South Africa. Several participants said they'd never shared their experiences before.

People forget themselves after a while - the longer you engage. Given the freedom to express themselves, a lot comes out that you might not otherwise hear.

Life is a wilderness in need of trees of Hope.

Life is a wilderness in need of trees of hope



Inclusion builds the self esteem of individuals and gives them a sense of being useful and resourceful.

Inclusion builds self esteem of individuals and gives them a sense of being useful and resourceful.



The pieces of writing produced were very powerful. The trauma of their experiences was coming through.

We heard from one wheelchair user who had very little use of his limbs after a car accident.

He was an educated man who sought advice from medical professionals but was told:

With a wife and son to support, he had to get on with his life. He did just that and was a great success.



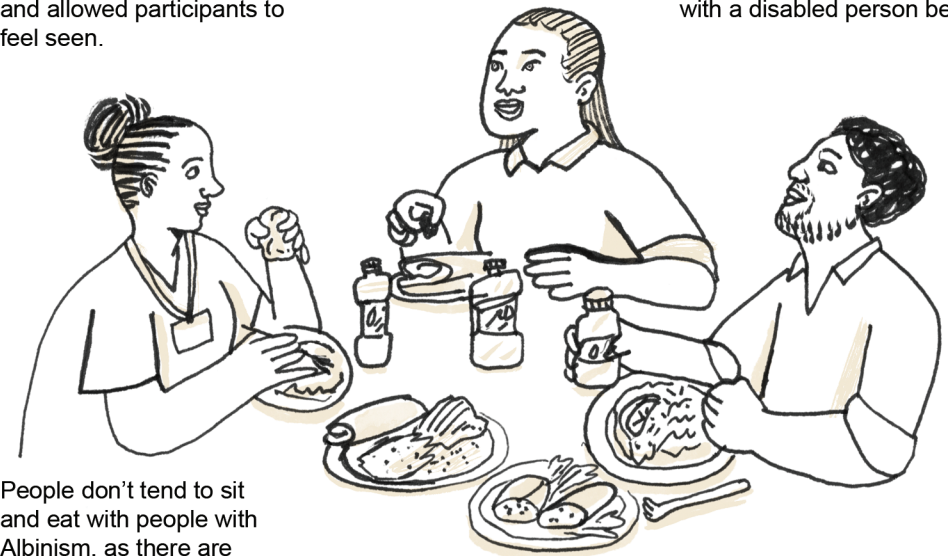
The pressure on him to get on with his life cost him the time to process the trauma of his experience.



Writing held the space for processing.

Art revealed truths no survey could reach. It helped institutions listen differently and allowed participants to feel seen.

For stakeholders, it opened reflection, some realised they had never informally spoken with a disabled person before.



People don't tend to sit and eat with people with Albinism, as there are beliefs they might catch it. A positive step in getting people to question their bias:

Why shouldn't we all eat together?

Why shouldn't we get taxis to and from the event together?



These were powerful unseen things going on around the workshops that have such a positive impact.

In Sierra Leone, a photography project reframed albinism through images of confidence and skill. These portraits later became part of advocacy campaigns.



Each person's idea of success was different: a teacher, a parent, a police officer. Every portrait showed their contribution and pride.

I now see my role as the glue connecting people and institutions and promoting understanding.



Using creative, inclusive research to turn empathy into action and impact.

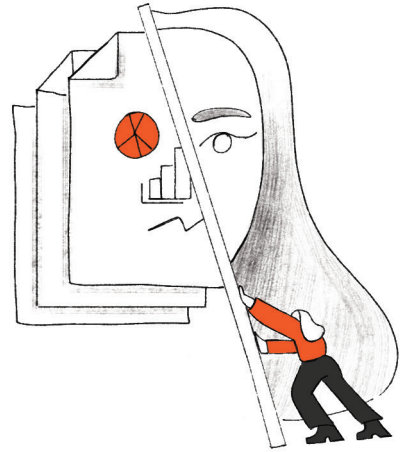


Gender Inequatities

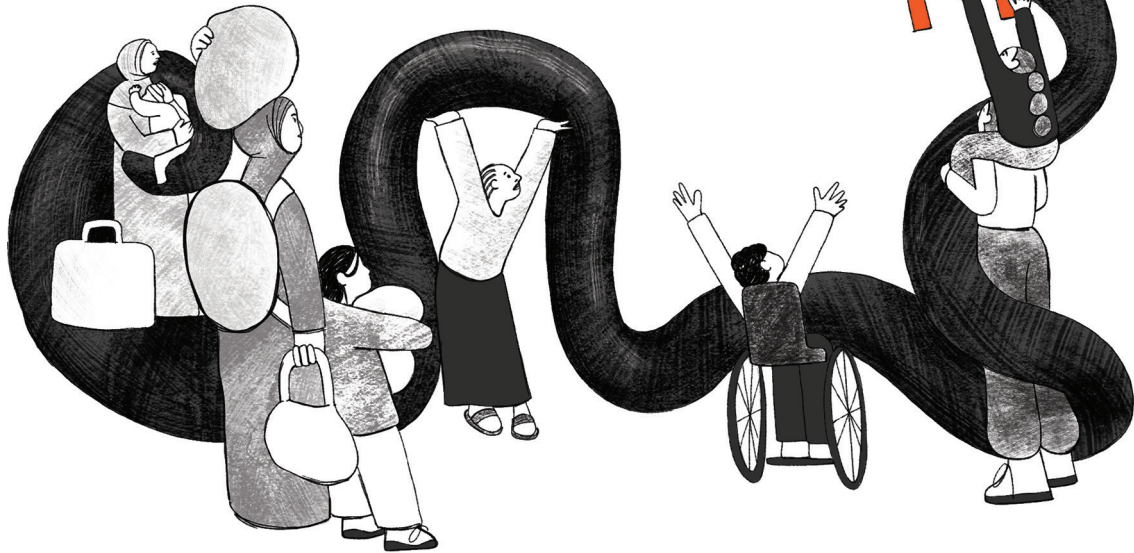
Sophie Alkhaled

SOPHIE ALKHALED

Research, especially qualitative research, is never neutral, it's about people. And we can't ignore the researcher in the process. Our academic lenses, personal experiences and histories shape how we listen, interpret and understand others' lived experiences, at home, at work, and in society.



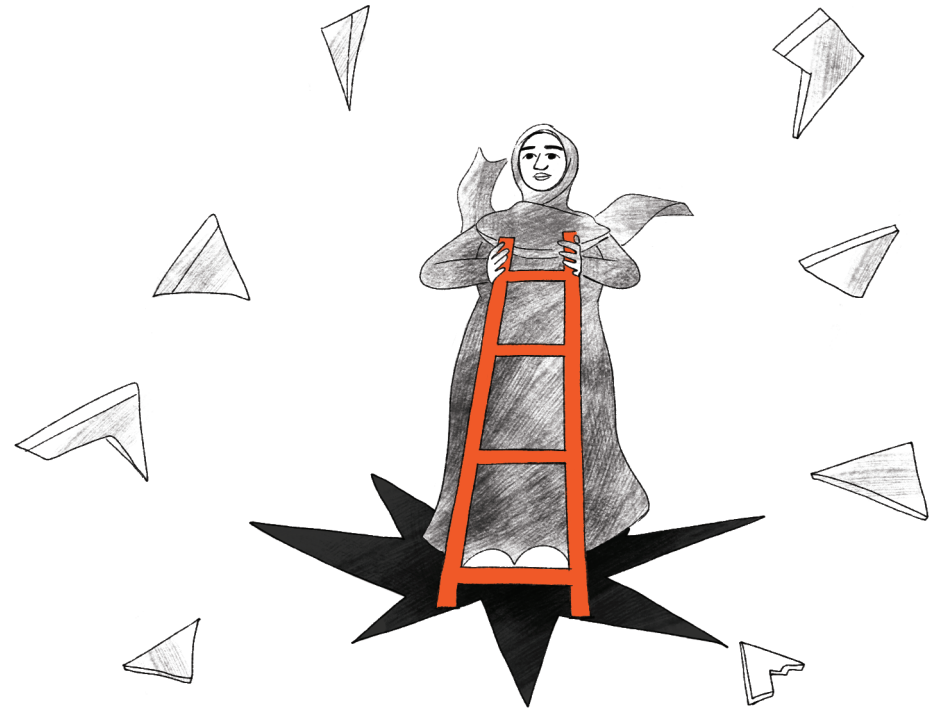
My work on gender equality spans organisations and refugee camps, universities and family homes. It explores the systems that hold women back and women's resilience in pushing back.



For almost two decades, I've researched how women in Europe and the Middle East use entrepreneurship as a tool for social and political change.



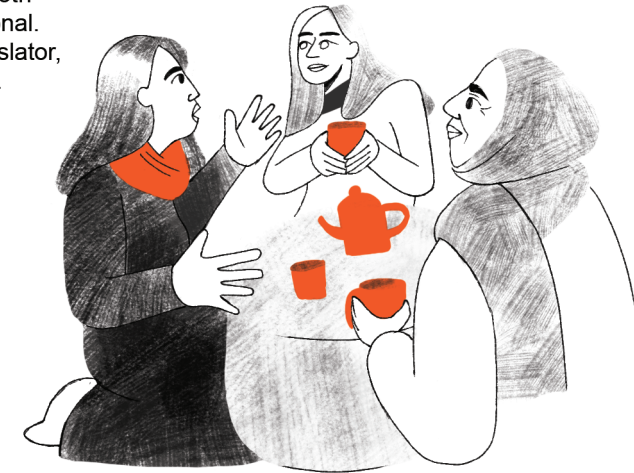
In places where financial dependence defines inequality, entrepreneurship becomes more than income, it's resistance. I've seen women build businesses not just to survive, but to reclaim agency for themselves and others within restrictive norms.



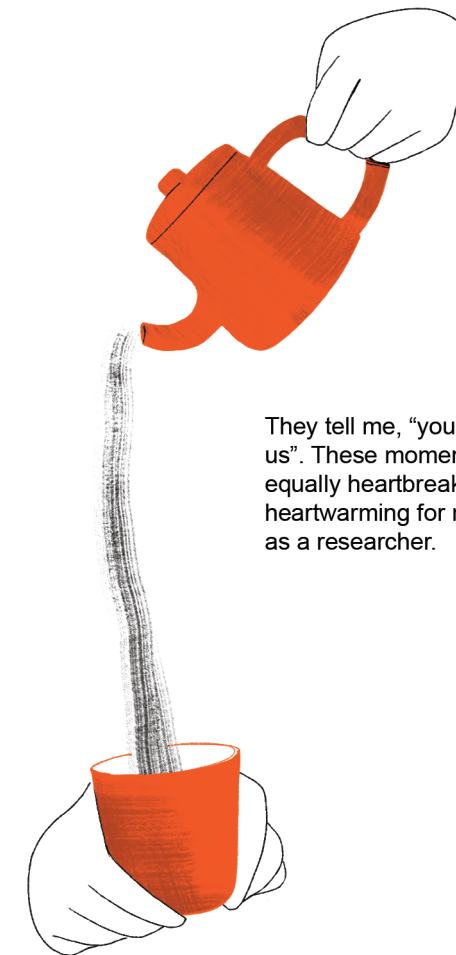
My own heritage shapes this work. I am of British-Syrian descent. I grew up in Saudi Arabia and worked in universities in the UK and Sweden.



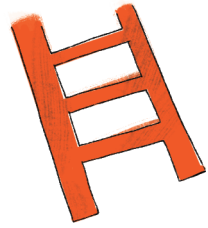
When I interview Syrian women refugees, it's both professional and personal. I speak Arabic, no translator, we share tea and trust.



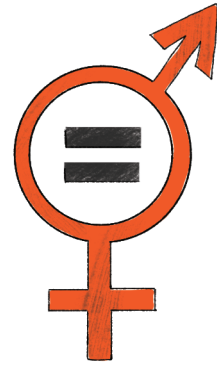
In interviews I embody the culture, the gestures, I relate to their stories about 'our homeland', and yet, cannot fathom how it must feel to be forcibly displaced.



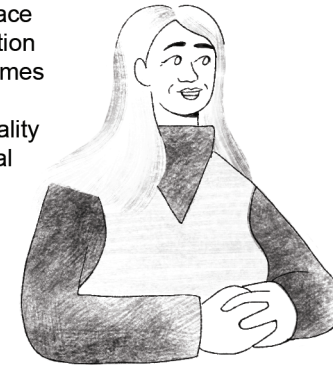
They tell me, "you're one of us". These moments are equally heartbreaking and heartwarming for me as a researcher.



At Lancaster University, where I lead Gender Equality initiatives, I speak with women academics about barriers to progression: short-term contracts, childcare costs, invisible emotional labour,



These conversations are familiar, shared privilege and shared frustration. Yet, the contrast between the struggles women face working in a top institution and women without homes couldn't be sharper. Both reveal how inequality runs through patriarchal systems worldwide.



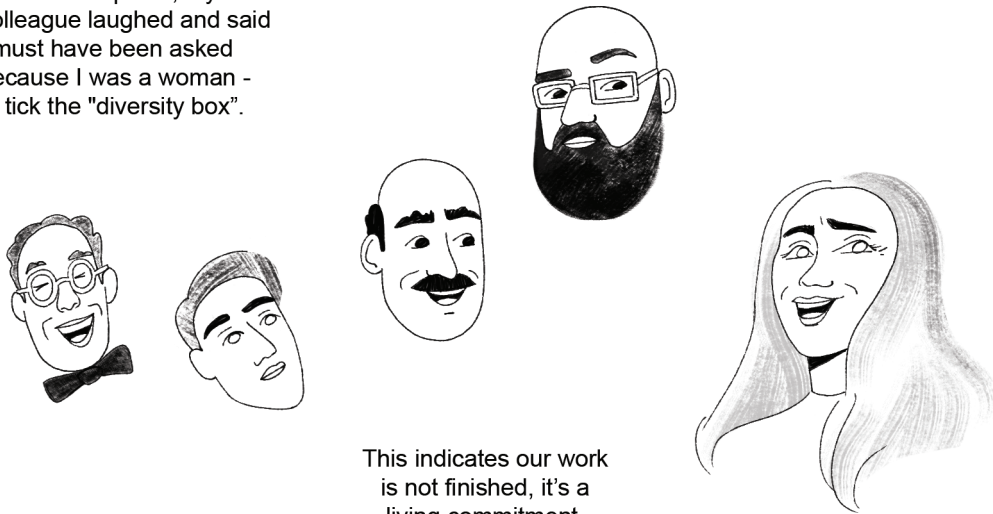
Our School's Gender Equality Report unveiled the "leaky pipeline" draining female talent from academia. It's a structural, cultural, and personal problem, but one being tackled.

and the double bind of being "too feminine" or "too masculine" to be a leader.

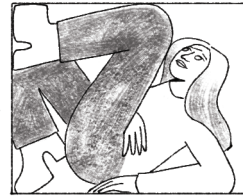


Gender equality plans are now embedded in the Management School, alongside wider inclusion and race equality work. We still have a way to go.

Recently I was asked to join an interview panel, my male colleague laughed and said I must have been asked because I was a woman - to tick the "diversity box".



This indicates our work is not finished, it's a living commitment.



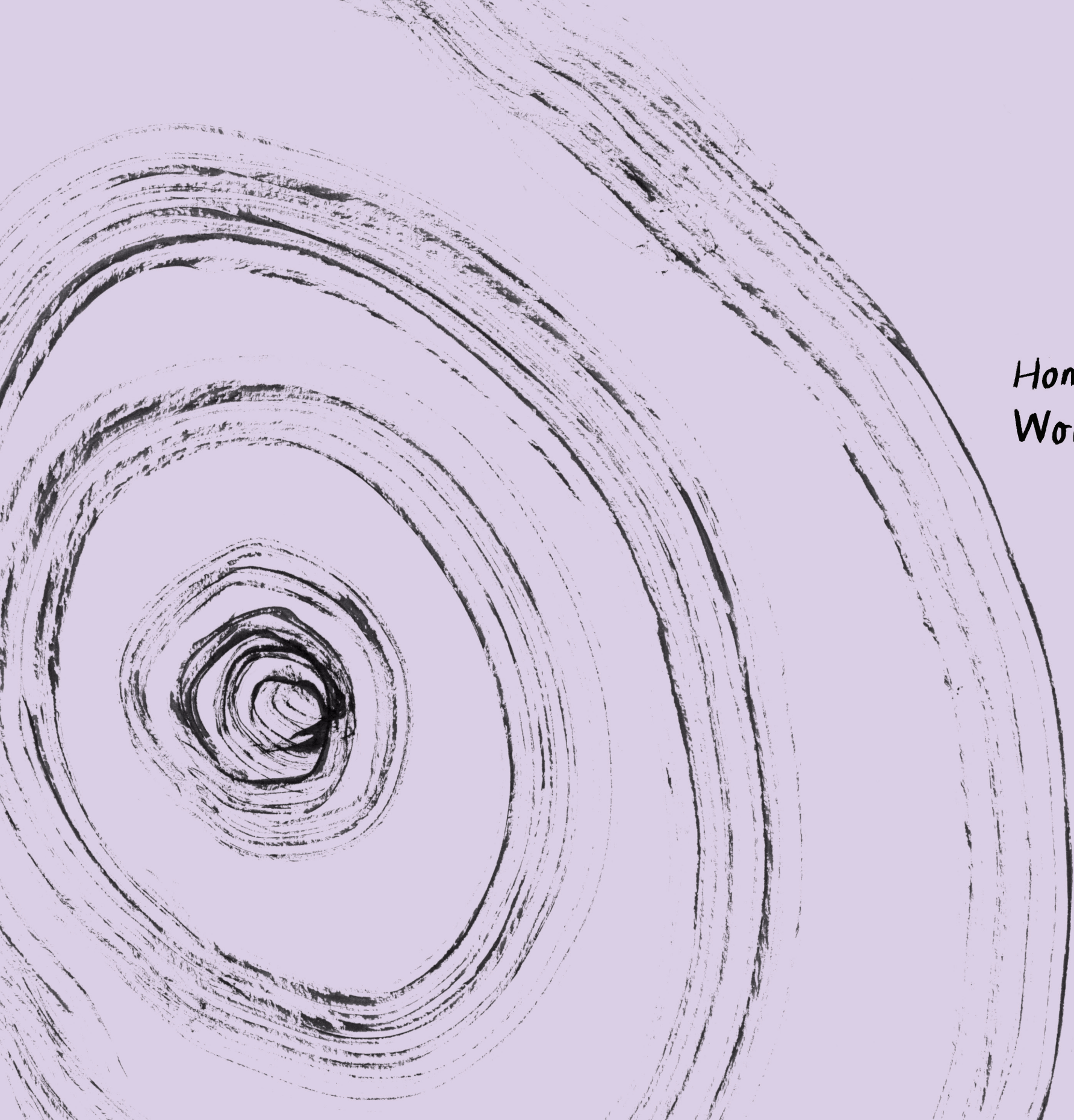
When it comes to the 'gender equality agenda', these experiences drive me to move beyond box-ticking, to build a research culture that truly values diversity.



Change is slow, built through persistence. I tell my research students: only study what you love enough to obsess over.



For me, that's gender equality. I'll keep fighting for it, in universities, refugee camps, and everywhere in between.



Home Educated Adults'
Workplace Experiences

Rachael Barrow

RACHAEL BARROW

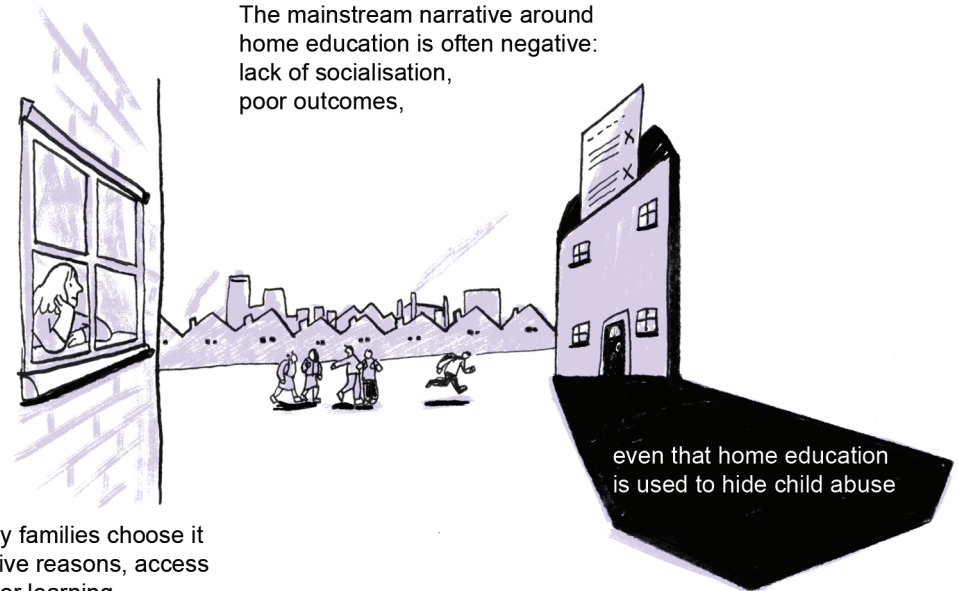
For my PhD, I studied adults who were home educated as children.



Asking how they experienced work, authority and colleagues across different industries.



I was home educated myself, and after struggling to adjust to the workplace, I wondered -



The mainstream narrative around home education is often negative: lack of socialisation, poor outcomes,

even that home education is used to hide child abuse

Yet many families choose it for positive reasons, access to outdoor learning, community involvement,

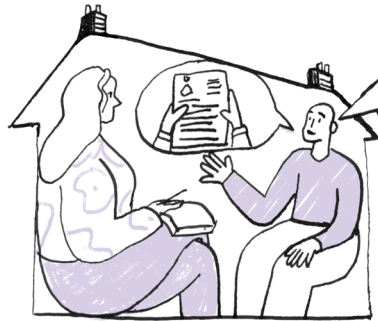


or because mainstream schools failed their children, especially those with SEND.



I wanted to show the full picture, the good, the bad, and everything in between.

My insider status helped participants trust me.



Creating space for their voice.



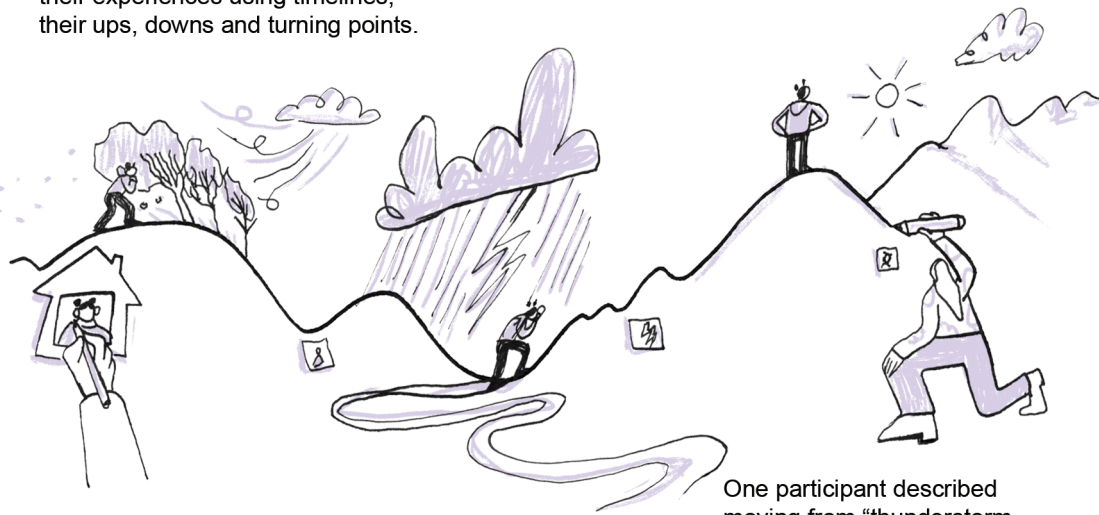
Deepening rapport.



I often shared my experiences but only after they'd shared their stories.



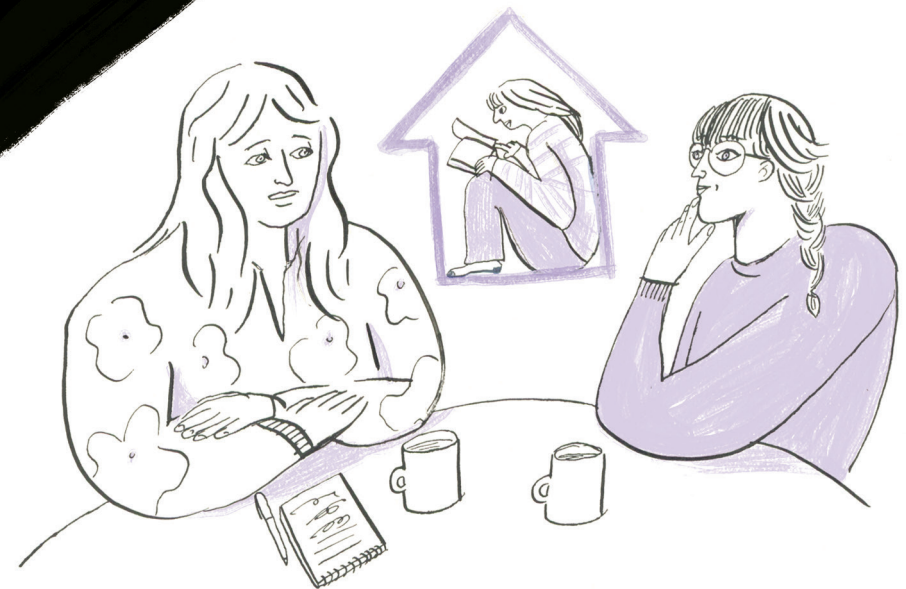
I interviewed 31 people and mapped their experiences using timelines, their ups, downs and turning points.



One participant described moving from "thunderstorm to glorious sunshine," I was capturing how non-linear these journeys are.



Some participants made new realisations during interviews. One woman recognised patterns of abuse at work she'd previously normalised, understanding her story differently for the first time, that it may have been linked to how she was schooled.



Though not intended as therapy, the process had meaning for both of us.

Getting this research approved was difficult. Some academics questioned whether home-educated people were a "marginalised" group worth studying,



Publicly educated senior academic.

You won't be able to find enough people to SPEAK with.

I don't see why HOME EDUCATED people are WORTHY of study.

Sorry, they're just not marginalised enough.

It's not enough of a Community to study

WHO GETS TO DECIDE WHOSE EXPERIENCES Matter?

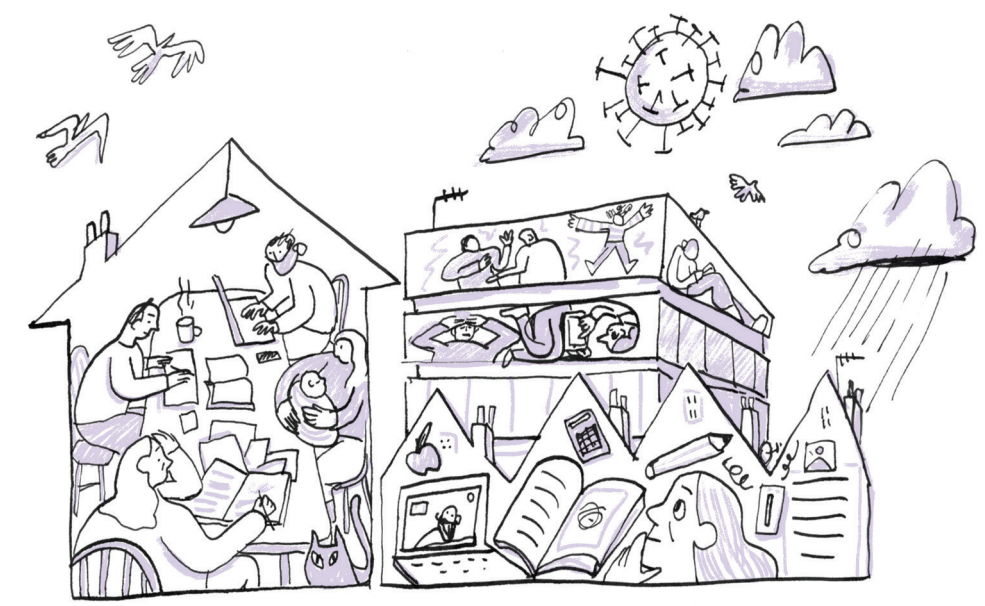


This is a form of GATEKEEPING

Then the Covid 19 Pandemic happened. This was a real turning point as so many were forced to home school.



SCHOOLS CLOSED



Inclusive research challenges that power. It insists that every community, however misunderstood, deserves to be heard, in their own voice.





Making ADVANCeS –
The Adolescent Vaping-Associated
Nicotine Cessation Service
with Professor Rachel



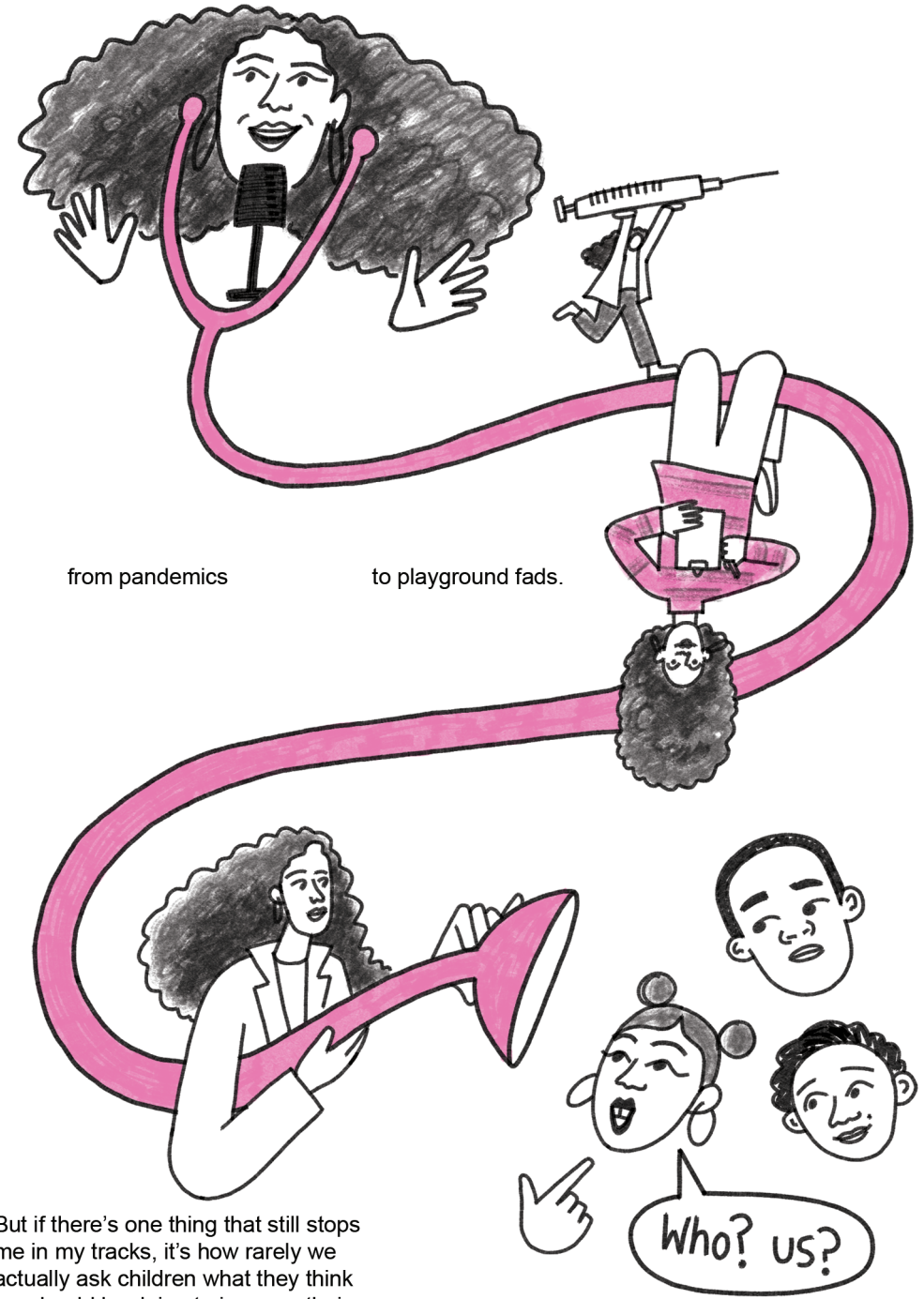
RACHEL ISBA

If we design for the most disadvantaged or excluded, everyone benefits.

I've been a children's doctor for over twenty years, and a professor for a good while too, my patients call me Professor Rachel.



I've seen everything,

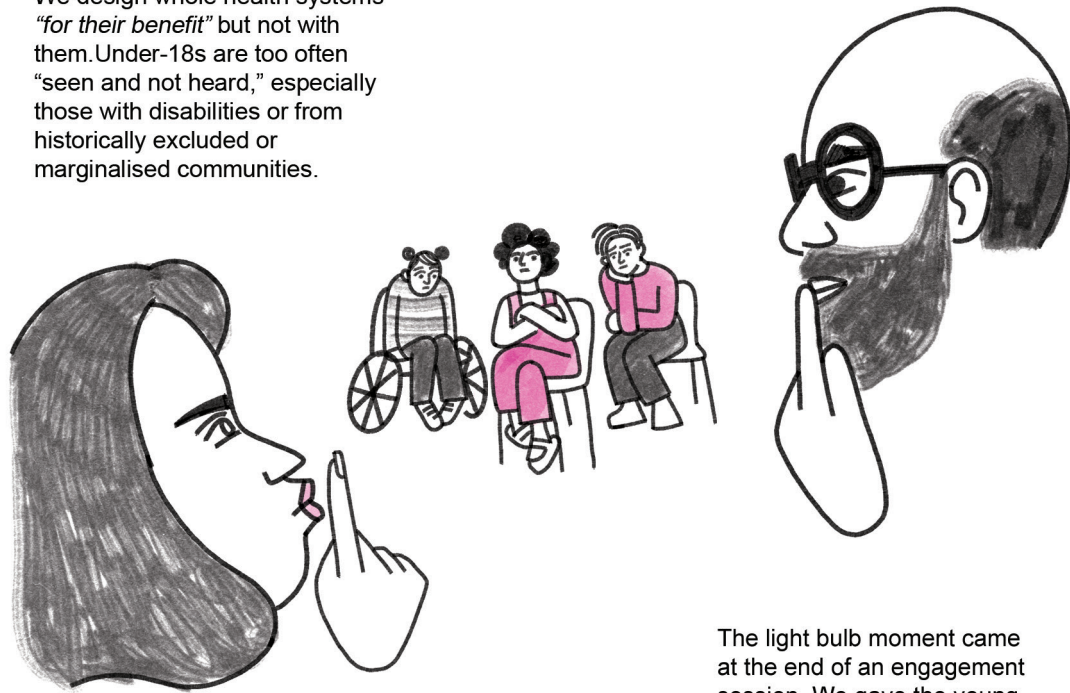


from pandemics

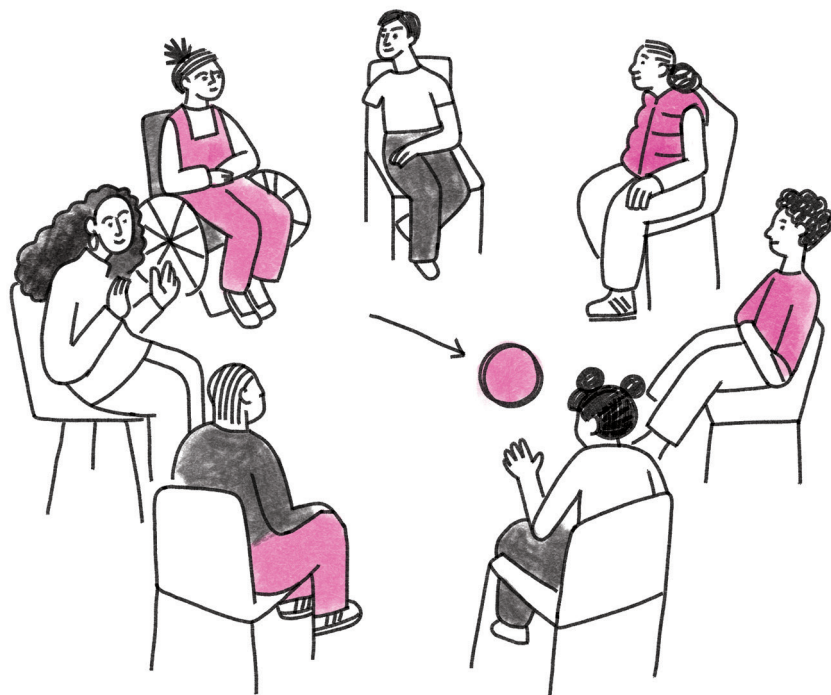
to playground fads.

But if there's one thing that still stops me in my tracks, it's how rarely we actually ask children what they think we should be doing to improve their health and wellbeing.

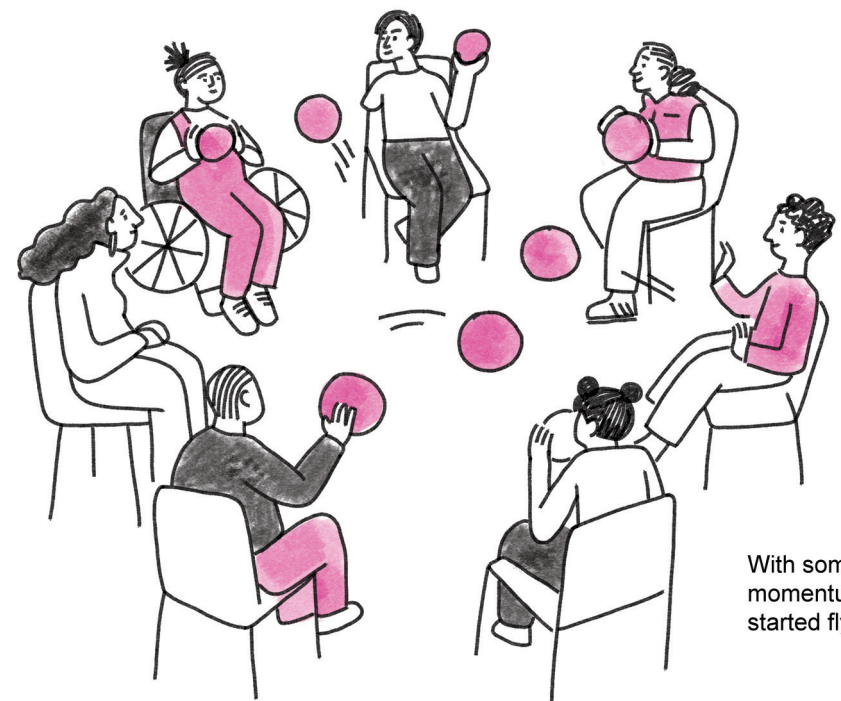
We design whole health systems "for their benefit" but not with them. Under-18s are too often "seen and not heard," especially those with disabilities or from historically excluded or marginalised communities.



The light bulb moment came at the end of an engagement session. We gave the young people the opportunity to lead on their health priorities.



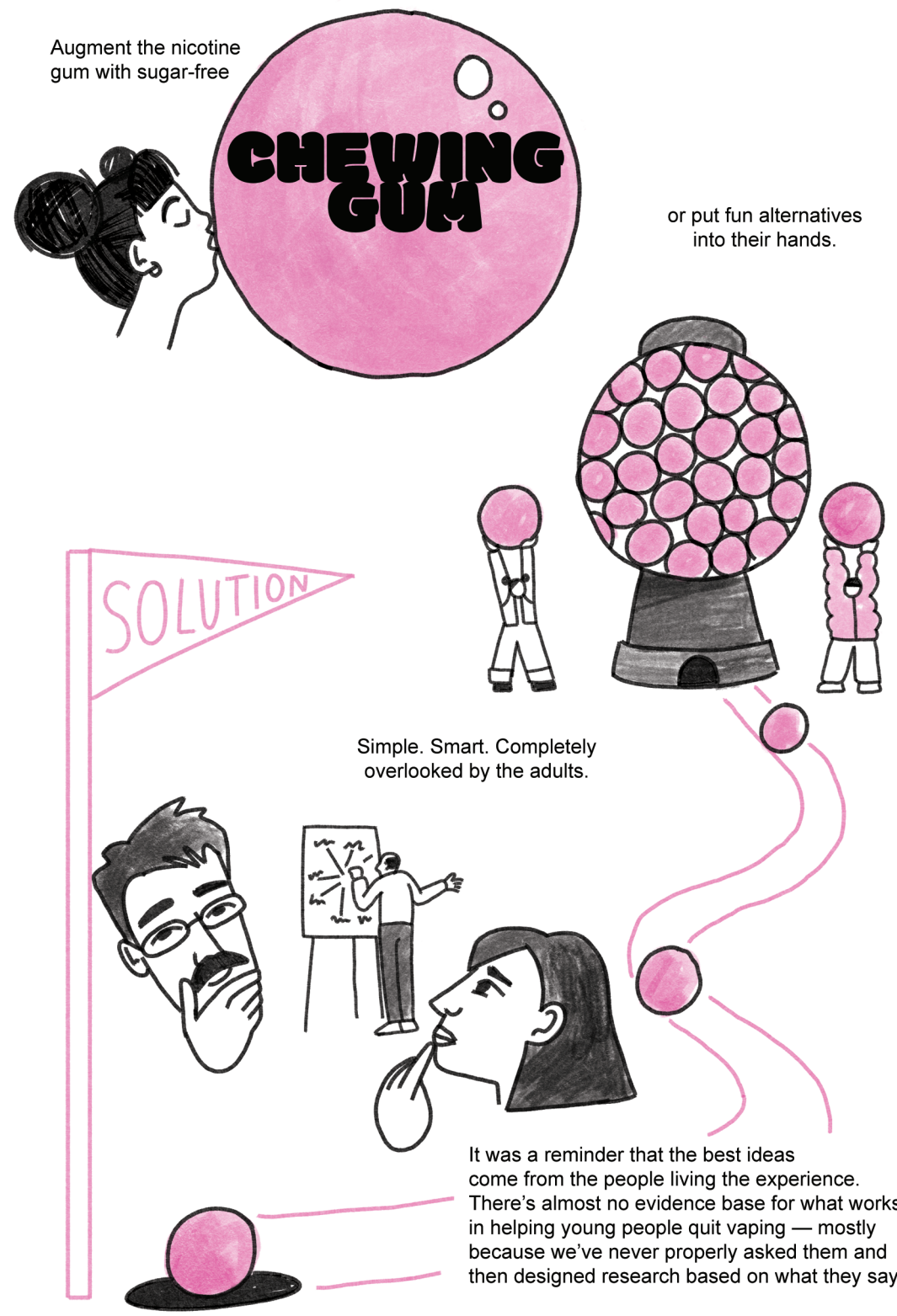
That was it! The start of our stop-vaping project, a seemingly simple observation, snowballed into a whole engagement project within a year.



With some built-up momentum, ideas started flying!

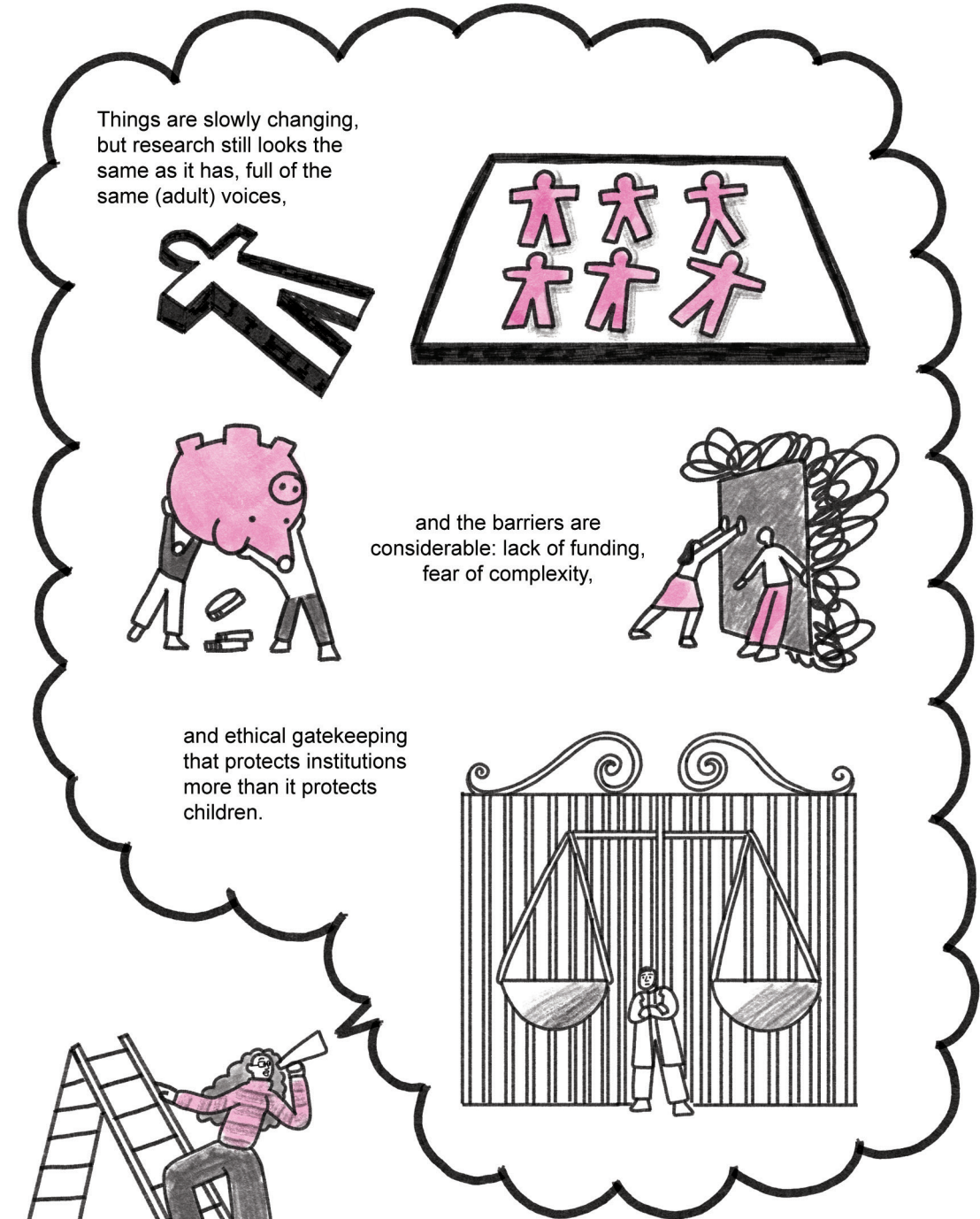


Fair point. Their solution?

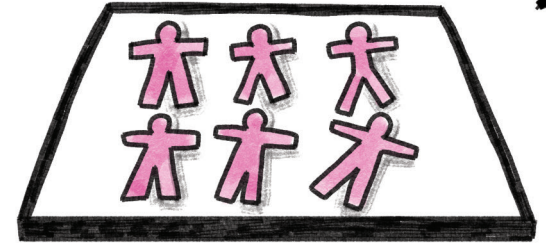
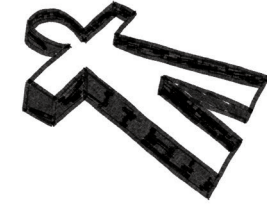




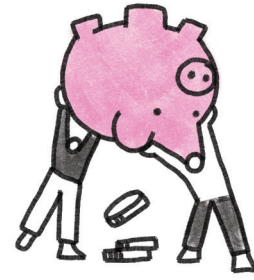
Apparently, that's "radical," but why shouldn't we? We pay adults involved in research. Children and young people's time and ideas are valuable too, and paying them shows that we value and respect them and their contributions.



Things are slowly changing, but research still looks the same as it has, full of the same (adult) voices,



and the barriers are considerable: lack of funding, fear of complexity,



and ethical gatekeeping that protects institutions more than it protects children.



I'm at a stage in life and career where I can use my privilege to say these things out loud.





Relational Autonomy

Sheila Payne

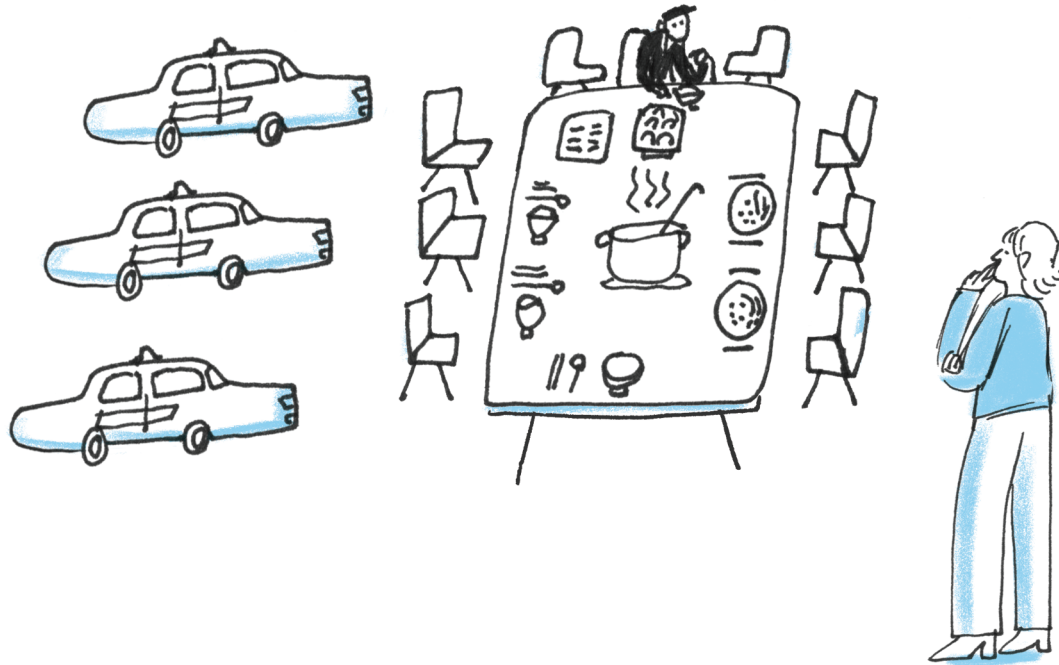


SHEILA PAYNE

In one project, we aimed to understand older Chinese people's views on death and dying in the UK.

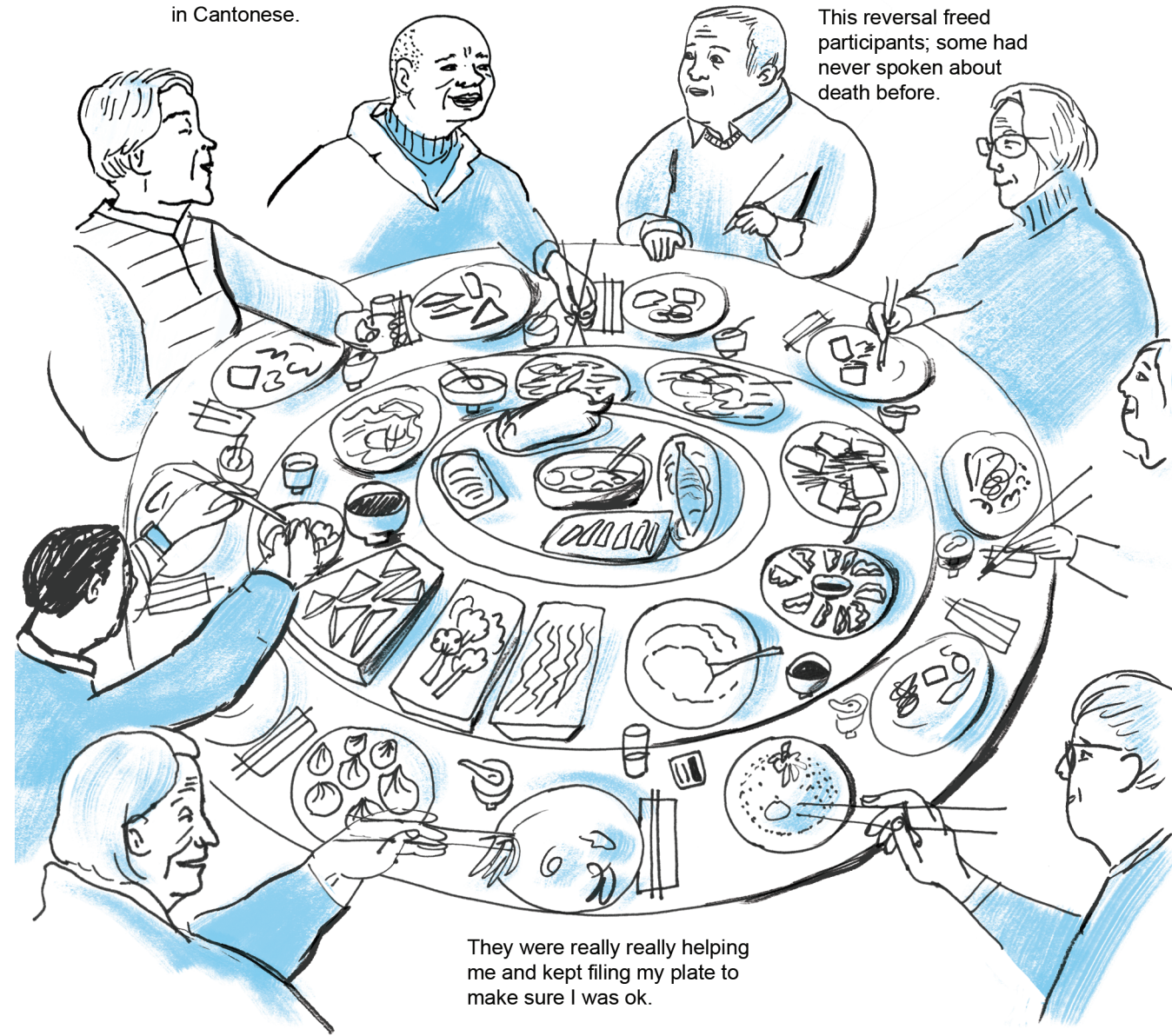


We organised an event at the university, with hot food and taxis, knowing how central food is in Chinese culture...



yet hardly anyone came.

So we changed our approach and met in Manchester's Chinatown, in a Chinese restaurant, with the whole discussion held in Cantonese.



That's when everything shifted. I was the one who needed translation.

This reversal freed participants; some had never spoken about death before.

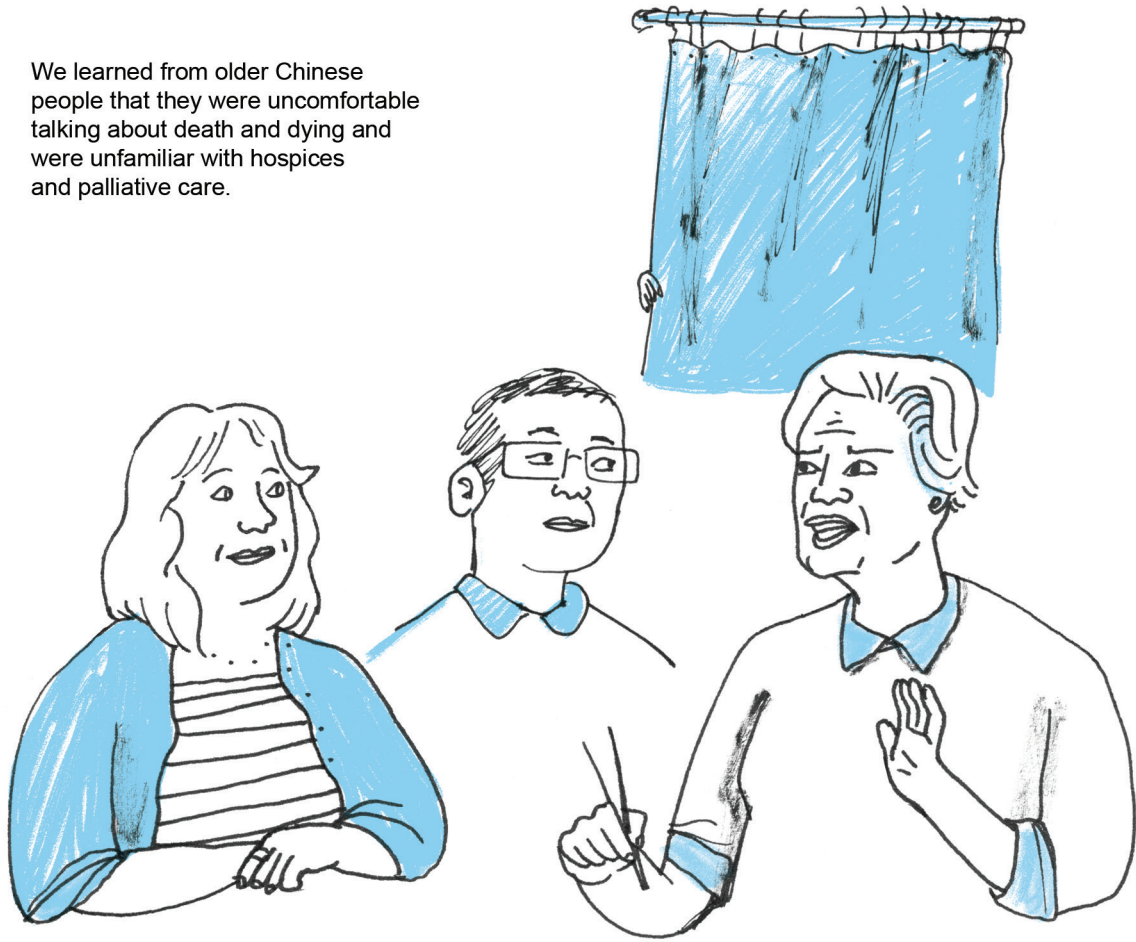
They were really really helping me and kept filling my plate to make sure I was ok.

How powerful it is to turn the tables - working like this takes you out of positions of power and gives it to those you're trying to work with.

This was a powerful insight. It gave me a glimpse of what it feels like to be outside the unspoken cultural rules.



We learned from older Chinese people that they were uncomfortable talking about death and dying and were unfamiliar with hospices and palliative care.



This seemed to be related to shared concerns whether they could manage pain, suffering and the dying person within the domestic space.



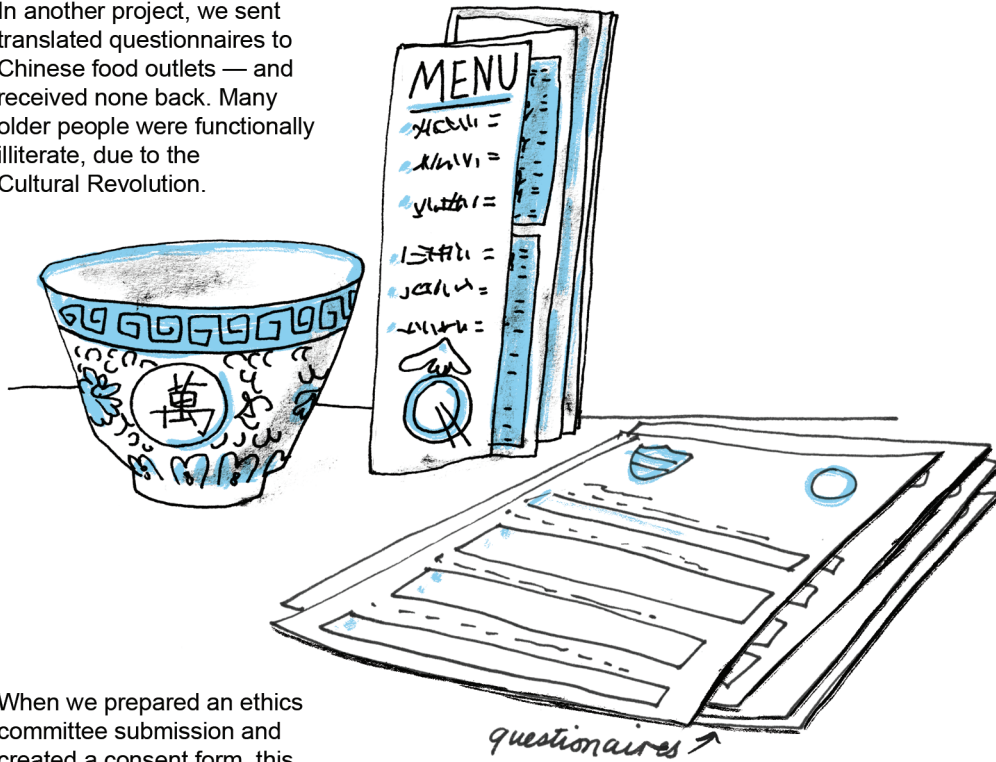
They instead expressed preference for the medicalised environment of the hospital.



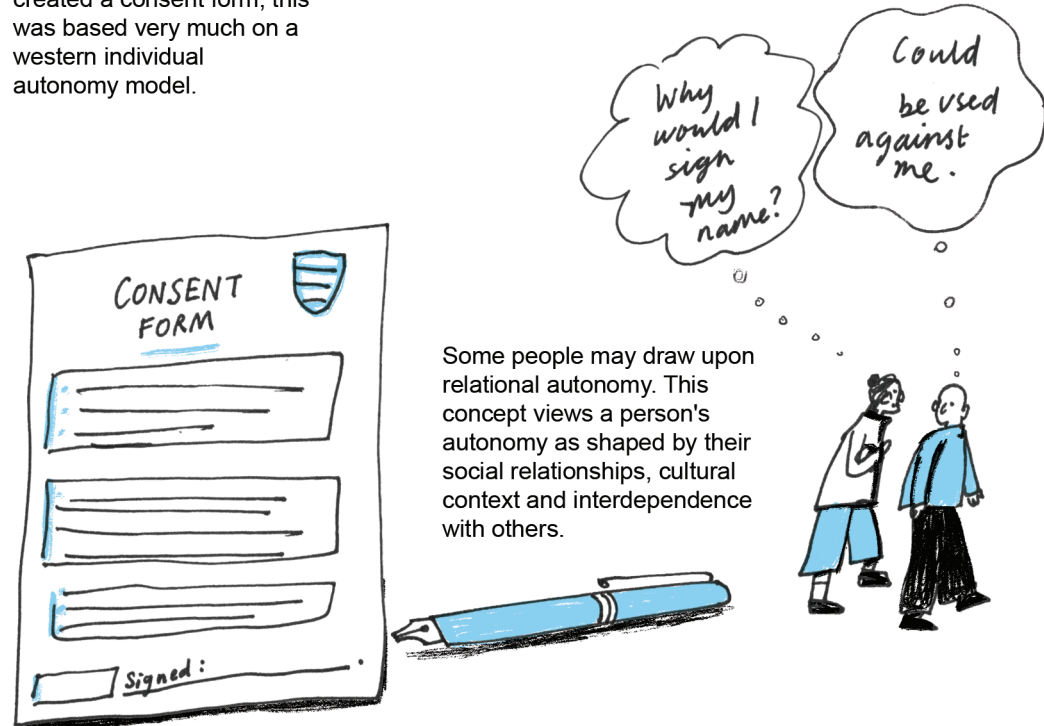
These concerns were expressed by Chinese elders as beliefs about 'contamination' of the domestic home (and, by implication, of the family) by the dying and dead body.



In another project, we sent translated questionnaires to Chinese food outlets — and received none back. Many older people were functionally illiterate, due to the Cultural Revolution.



When we prepared an ethics committee submission and created a consent form, this was based very much on a western individual autonomy model.



Some people may draw upon relational autonomy. This concept views a person's autonomy as shaped by their social relationships, cultural context and interdependence with others.

Being interviewed is a western cultural construct. If you come from a society that is politically oppressive you might think of interviews not as a fair exchange of ideas, but as being interrogated by police.



They are for when you've done something wrong.



True inclusion means questioning these assumptions and reshaping our methods.

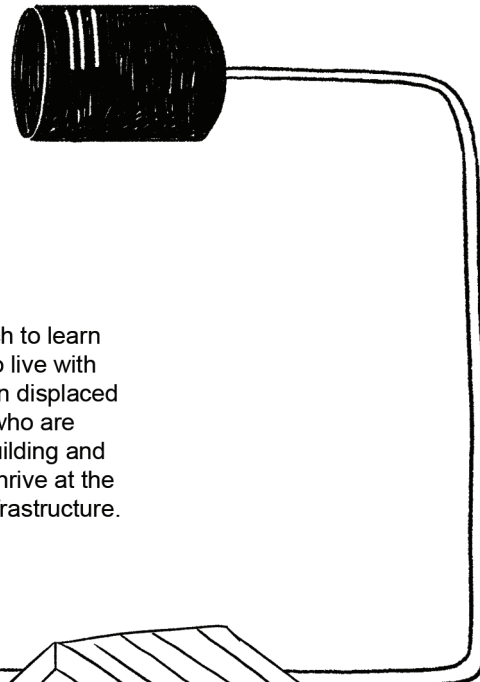
The background of the image is a vibrant yellow, overlaid with several thick, black, curved brushstrokes that sweep across the frame from the top left towards the bottom right. The strokes vary in thickness and texture, with some appearing as solid black bands and others as more layered, painterly strokes. The overall effect is dynamic and artistic.

The GREAT Project

Carlos López Galviz

CARLOS LÓPEZ GALVIZ

Our role as researchers isn't to *give voice*, it's to learn how to *listen*.



We have so much to learn from people who live with less privilege, often displaced communities who are reimagining, rebuilding and creating ways to thrive at the edges of formal infrastructure.



People who show deep resilience and resourcefulness in the face of daily challenges.



Listening begins with curiosity. For me, that curiosity started with a fascination for infrastructure, history and a drive to make a positive difference.

I was born in Cali, Colombia, and later moved to Europe for my postgraduate studies.



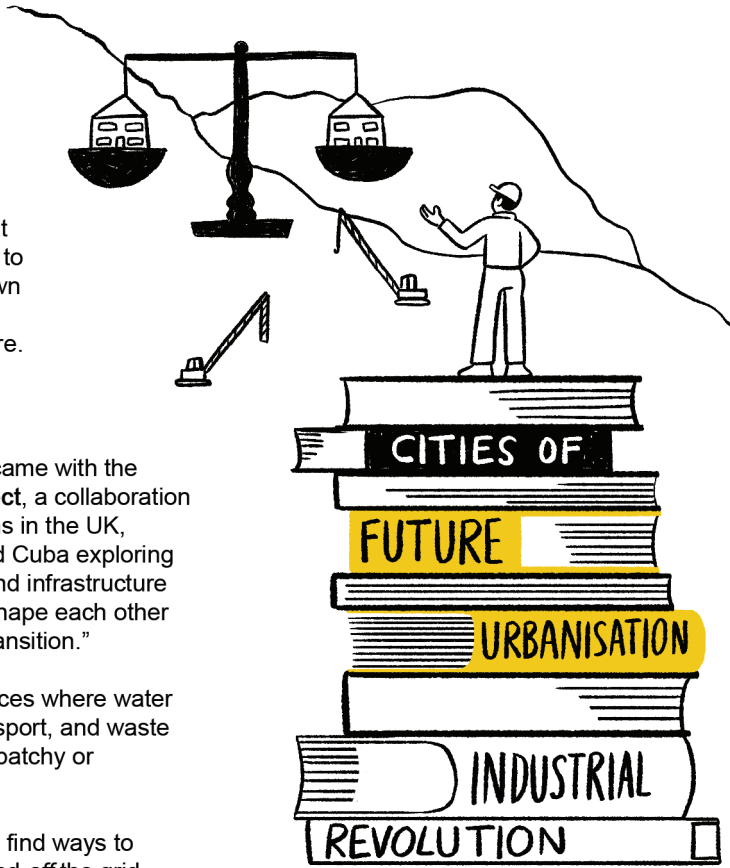
During my final year studying architecture in Cali, my path started to come into focus.



I spent 18 months doing fieldwork in an informal settlement, largely occupied and built by Afro-Colombian migrants. What began as curiosity turned into a calling to study urbanisation beyond architecture, to understand the human side of cities.



As part of my doctorate, I researched infrastructure and urbanisation in London and Paris, perhaps with the implicit hope of applying that theory and knowledge back to Cali. As a historian, I'm drawn to the idea that the past can guide how we build the future.



That chance came with the **GREAT Project**, a collaboration between teams in the UK, Colombia, and Cuba exploring how people and infrastructure interact and shape each other in "areas of transition."

These are places where water systems, transport, and waste networks are patchy or incomplete.

Where people find ways to live both *on* and *off* the grid.



The project brought together engineers, sociologists, urban planners, designers and community leaders to rethink the relationship between people and urban infrastructure. Funded by the **UKRI-ESRC Global Challenges Research Fund**, our work focused on a small selection of informal settlements in **Cali, Colombia**, and in **Havana, Cuba**.

In these contexts, "informality" can mean slums, favelas, invasions, words often used to describe what's "lacking." But these are also popular neighbourhoods, full of ingenuity, culture, and community.



We explored three key ideas:

Transition



Intersectionality



and Imaginaries of Change.



Transition looks different in each place.

In **Cuba**, it's about a nation rewriting its constitution after decades of embargo, rethinking its social and economic future.

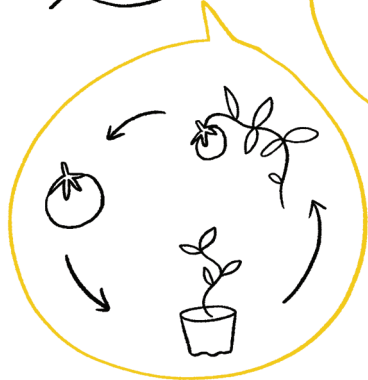
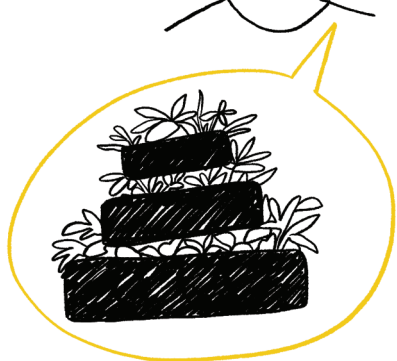
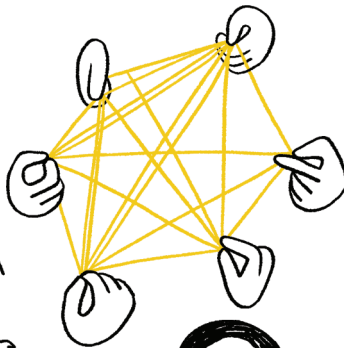


In **Colombia**, it's about peace. After the ceasefire between the government and the **FARC**, many displaced families fled rural violence for safety in the city. But too often, they landed in informal settlements that the "formal" city wasn't ready to embrace.

By listening to these communities, we began to see how sustainability already exists in the margins. How the informal might guide the formal.

Residents shared practices they've been developing for decades: composting, repurposing wire to make handbags, and building with bottle bricks.

They showed us that sustainability isn't just a target, it's a lived reality.



The UN asserts that cities will play a vital role in futures that are more just, equitable and sustainable.

For GREAT, we worked together across three publicLab themes: **transport & mobility**, **zero-waste**, and **urban planning**.



Fieldwork took us into Cali's District 18, hillside communities with steep challenges: fragile housing, poor access roads, scarce transport and uncertain land rights.



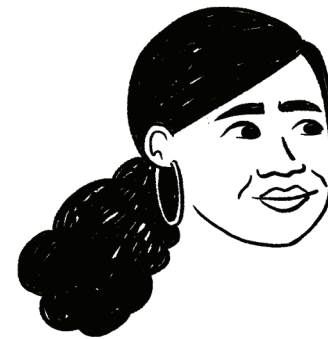
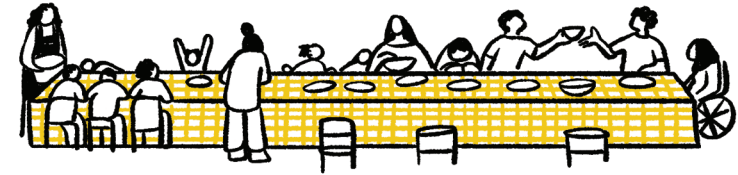
That's where we met Francy Mina.

Francy was displaced by conflict at the age of 18, leaving her rural home in El Tambo, Cauca, for safety and opportunity in Cali. Two decades later, she's the president of the Community Action Board in Brisas de las Palmas. She's a force for good, organising for legal recognition, public services and better living conditions.

Francy also runs a community kitchen, serving meals to dozens of vulnerable people every day.



What began with donated food and volunteers now has the support variously provided by the Mayor's Office, the Archdiocese, and local food banks.



"We don't see it as an informal settlement—it's our *barrio popular*, our neighbourhood. A space of belonging. But you have to adapt the hard way, by force. You put up with humiliations, and still keep going."

Francy and her neighbours aren't waiting for the city to fix things, they're already leading change.

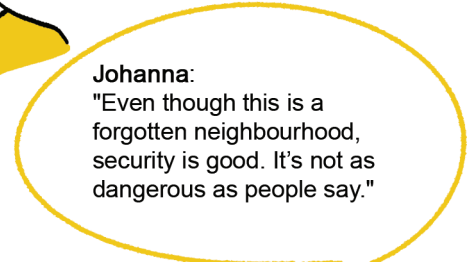


As the project evolved, we focused on amplifying the voices we'd been learning from.

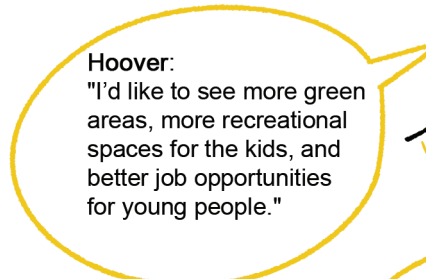
Following an exhibition and artist commission in summer 2023, we launched the 30 GREAT Voices collection, personal stories and video portraits of residents telling their own experiences in their own words.



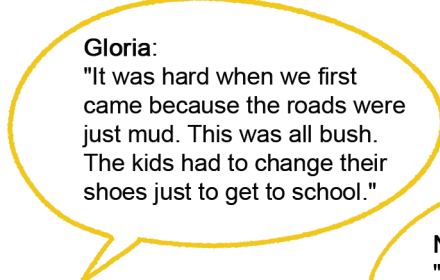
Fidelino: "The riot police have kicked us out of here at least ten or twelve times, but we've always stood our ground and defended our right to live on this land."



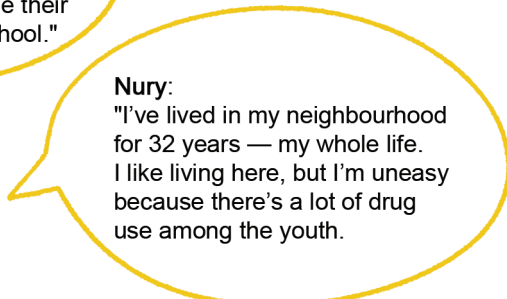
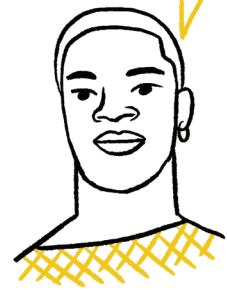
Johanna: "Even though this is a forgotten neighbourhood, security is good. It's not as dangerous as people say."



Hoover: "I'd like to see more green areas, more recreational spaces for the kids, and better job opportunities for young people."



Gloria: "It was hard when we first came because the roads were just mud. This was all bush. The kids had to change their shoes just to get to school."



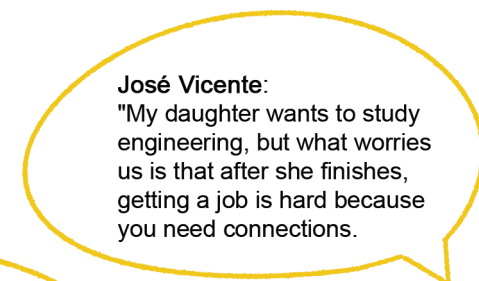
Nury: "I've lived in my neighbourhood for 32 years — my whole life. I like living here, but I'm uneasy because there's a lot of drug use among the youth."



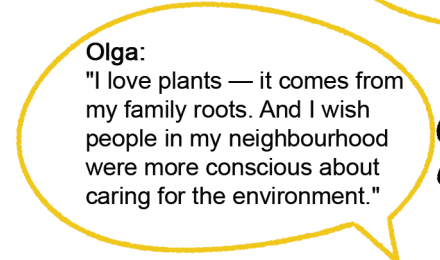
María Ofelia: "There was no electricity, no water, no streets... To cook, we had to bring firewood from the hills."



Francy: "When I first arrived here, I got involved in social and community work — why? Because somebody had to do it."



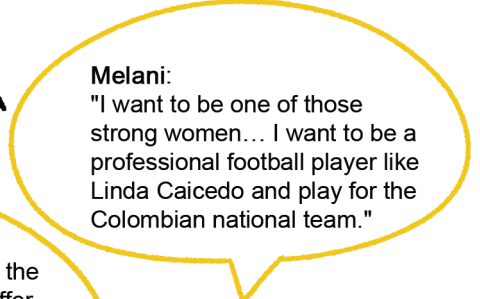
José Vicente: "My daughter wants to study engineering, but what worries us is that after she finishes, getting a job is hard because you need connections."



Olga: "I love plants — it comes from my family roots. And I wish people in my neighbourhood were more conscious about caring for the environment."



Libardo: "I have a bakery here in the neighbourhood. If you offer good service to people — whether they are children or elders — you're contributing to society and building peace."



Melani: "I want to be one of those strong women... I want to be a professional football player like Linda Caicedo and play for the Colombian national team."



Mónica: "I love social work and I've been doing it for seven years. With a colleague, we opened a community kitchen."



Ari Paz: "My parents taught me the right path: to be poor but honourable, never taking what isn't yours. I've taught my children the same."

Flor Caraballi:
"I was able to build my house through a savings group we set up here with 20 other people. Little by little we bought bricks, cement, sand..."



María Mellizo:
"I'm the treasurer of the Community Action Board. That means I have to move around more than others and take on all kinds of roles."



Petronila: "I came here wanting to start a business, but I didn't have any money. Life gave me little by little — I started selling rice, flour, salt..."



Antonio:
"I work as a community leader, we're working on the collective legalization of our neighbourhoods, with support from the university and Cali's Secretary of Housing."

Absalón:
"I love environmental work — it's my hobby. I come from a rural area; I'm a campesino. I was born into agriculture and carry it inside me."



Emilia:
"This place used to be a dumping site, but my husband and I started clearing it and building. At the beginning everything was wood. Little by little things improved — our jobs, and my son was able to study. Now the house is made of brick."

Mariela: "I didn't want a wooden house... so with my husband we took out a loan from the bank to buy better construction materials, and our children helped with their work."



Rosario:
"In the future, I want to be healthy so I can watch my grandchildren grow... I want to keep fixing up this house and build strong walls."



Nancy:
"I'm a homemaker, an artisan, a seamstress, and a mother of three. My craft is making rag dolls, Christmas dolls, paintings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings."

Cristian:
"I teach football to the kids until they reach an age where they can move forward without falling into drugs. But we really need a better pitch in the neighbourhood."



Cecilia:
"As children, we helped carry the laundry from the river because that was the only place where we could wash clothes. While the clothes dried, we would bathe and play."



Birgelina:
"I run a small food business. I sell fried food — I make everything: empanadas, chorizos, fries. I like working so I can have my own money."

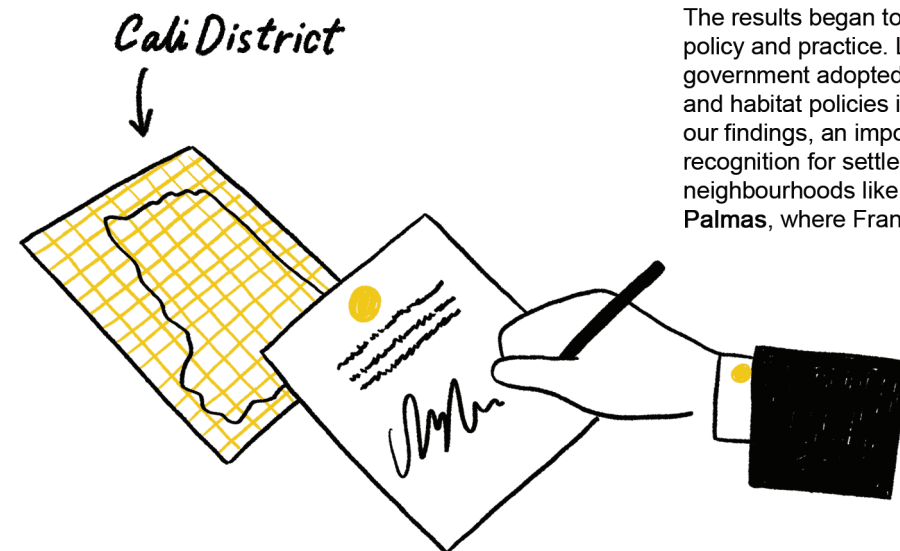
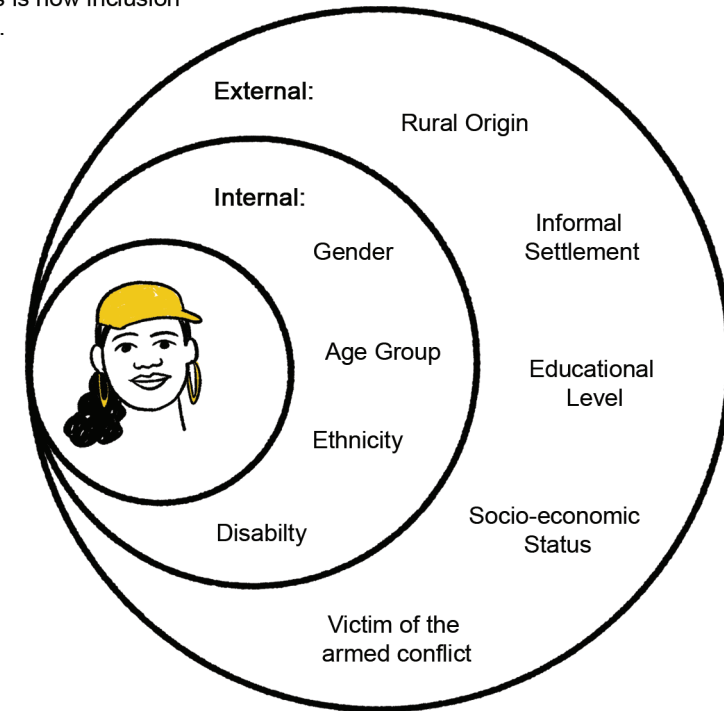


Residents could see their interviews projected into models of their homes in the exhibition **The City Off the Map** which celebrated their collective spirit.

The art installation and video portraits are the result of the collaborative work led by the theatre and digital art company **Imitating the Dog**.



Intersectionality became one of our guiding lens. Each person's story revealed overlapping challenges such as mobility issues, displacement, gender, or exposure to violence. Listening deeply to these experiences is how inclusion truly begins.



The results began to materialise in policy and practice. Local government adopted new housing and habitat policies influenced by our findings, an important official recognition for settlements and neighbourhoods like **Brisas de las Palmas**, where Francy lives.

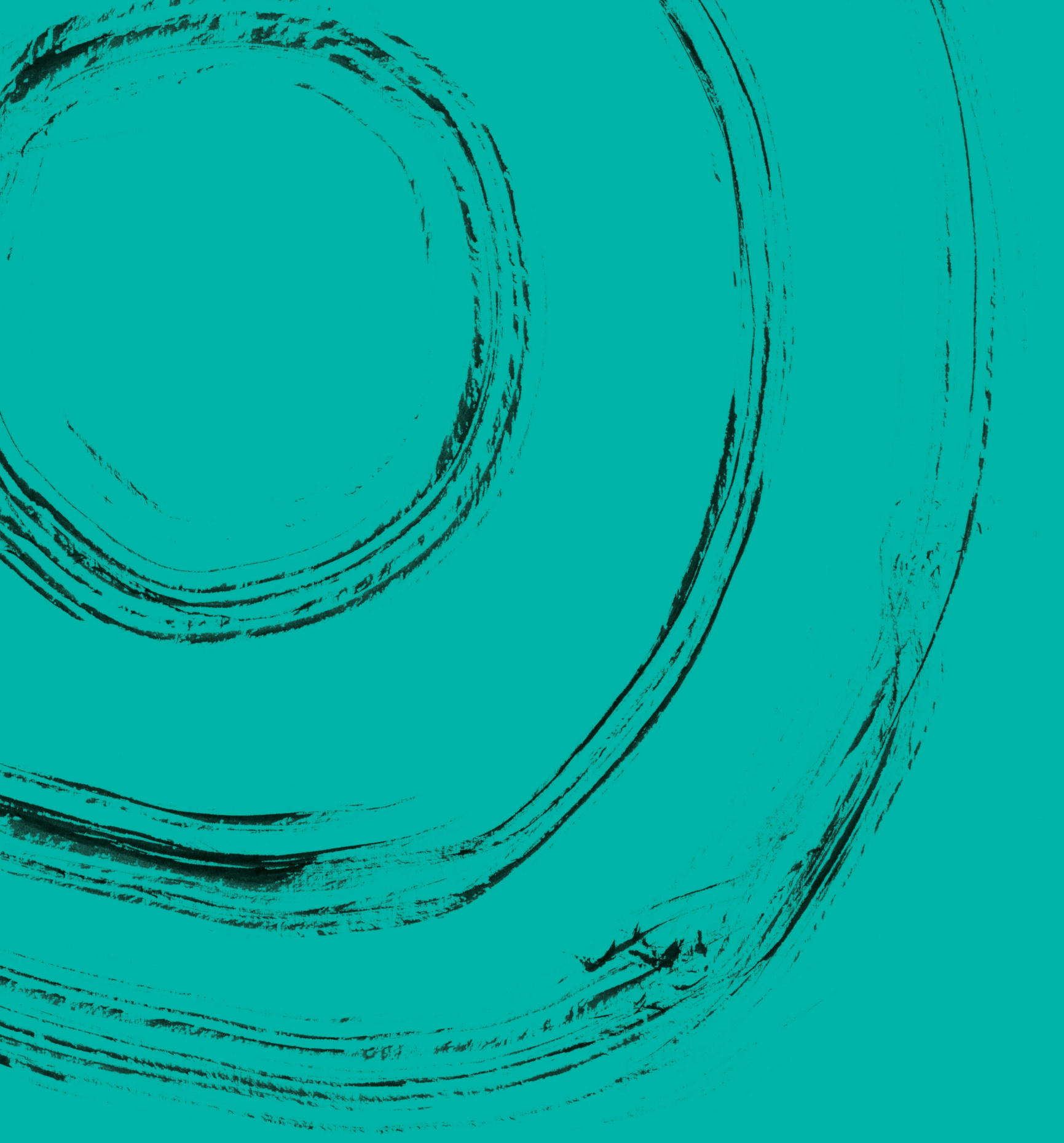
But the real achievement belongs to this resilient community. By tuning in, listening and learning, the role of research shifts: from diagnosing and prescribing to amplifying agency.



Because an informal popular neighbourhood isn't a deficit—it's a living, breathing home. A place of improvisation, collaboration and shared knowledge and experience.



The bridge we've built between people, policy and recognition is a step toward a more equitable, more just and more social future.



Research Ready
Communities
Blackpool
Buket Kara

BUKET KARA

BLACKPOOL'S Research Ready Community pilot

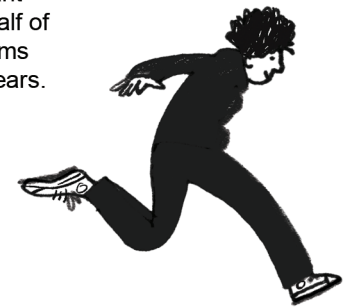
began in 2021, and I joined in 2023. The aim of the project was to support communities to understand health research, its benefits, and how to take part, giving them a voice on the issues that matter most to them.



Inspired by Resilience Revolution – HeadStart Blackpool programme, co-production became embedded across the town.



Adolescence is an important point for intervention, as half of adult mental health problems start during the teenage years.



From the start, young people in Blackpool decided what mattered to them. They set the research priorities.

The young people interviewed me to see if I was the right researcher for them.



One young person said:

'if only my parents KNEW MORE about mental health -

my life would be SO MUCH easier.'



That became our starting point: exploring what parents in Blackpool know about mental health. The strength of this research lies in that origin, it came directly from lived experience.

We expanded the group to recruit parents and carers who were interested in being part of this research as well.



Our interviews were conducted with and by local residents, young people interviewing young people, parents interviewing other parents.

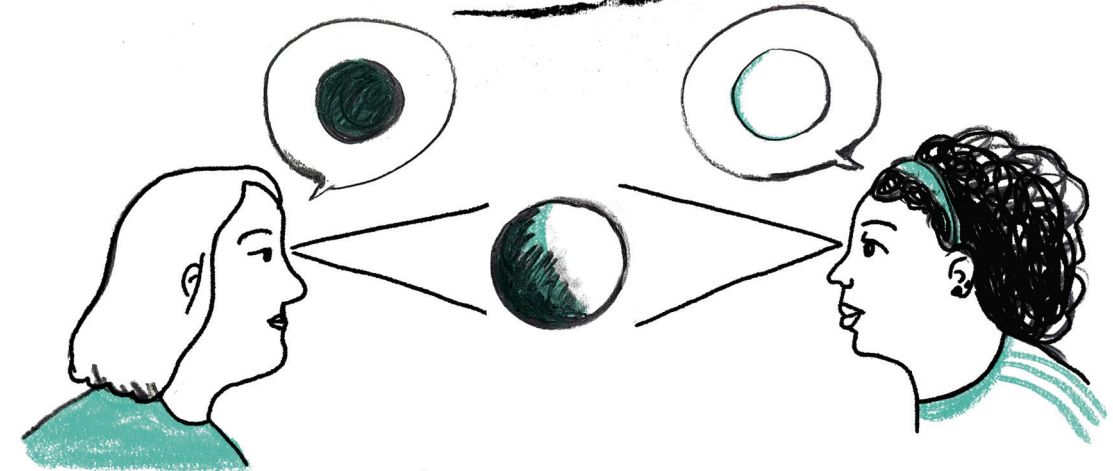
This reduced power imbalances and helped participants open up more easily. Of course, there's a trade-off: interviewers bring their own experiences, which can shape responses.



We explored the literature together, critically reviewing existing studies. Many previous projects were designed by researchers alone, without input from the people most affected.



We addressed this through regular debriefs. What matters more is reflexivity and honesty, acknowledging who we are and how that shapes our work.



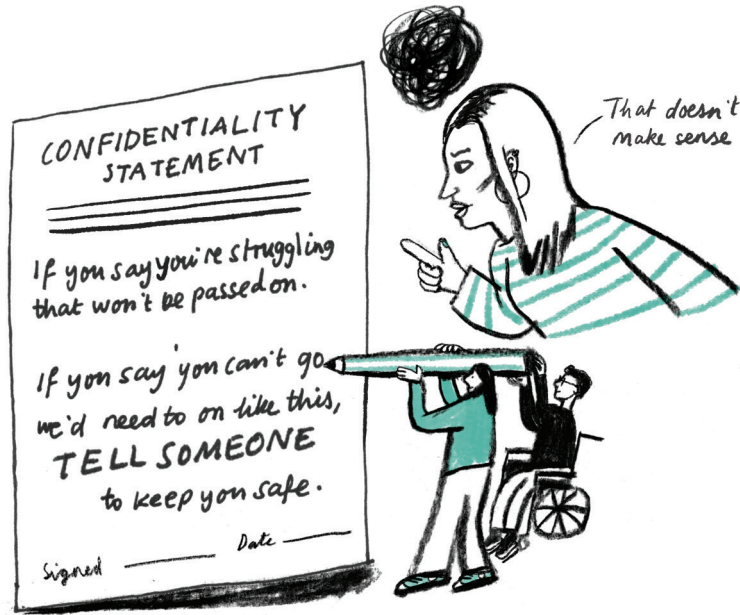
We wanted to change that.

RECOGNISING TRUE OBJECTIVITY DOESN'T EXIST

Inclusive research also meant making every stage accessible.

For example, the standard confidentiality statement in participant information sheets was confusing.

The young researchers rewrote it with examples:



Through this process we learned that parents often notice issues too late; for example once the young person is self harming. Earlier, simple interventions, like exercise or shared activities like game nights could build stronger coping strategies.

They also explained what ethical approval means:



These small changes made a big difference. They built trust with participants, parents and the wider community.



I trained young people and parents/carers to conduct semi-structured interviews, and they led the fieldwork themselves. Working this way takes more time and effort.



One young person was initially hesitant to discuss mental health. She helped us reframe our questions to be more sensitive, a valuable lesson for me about cultural differences in communication around sensitive topics.

Over the project, her confidence grew dramatically: her first interview lasted 10 minutes, her last, 70. She became comfortable connecting deeply with participants and more confident discussing sensitive or taboo concepts, such as mental health.



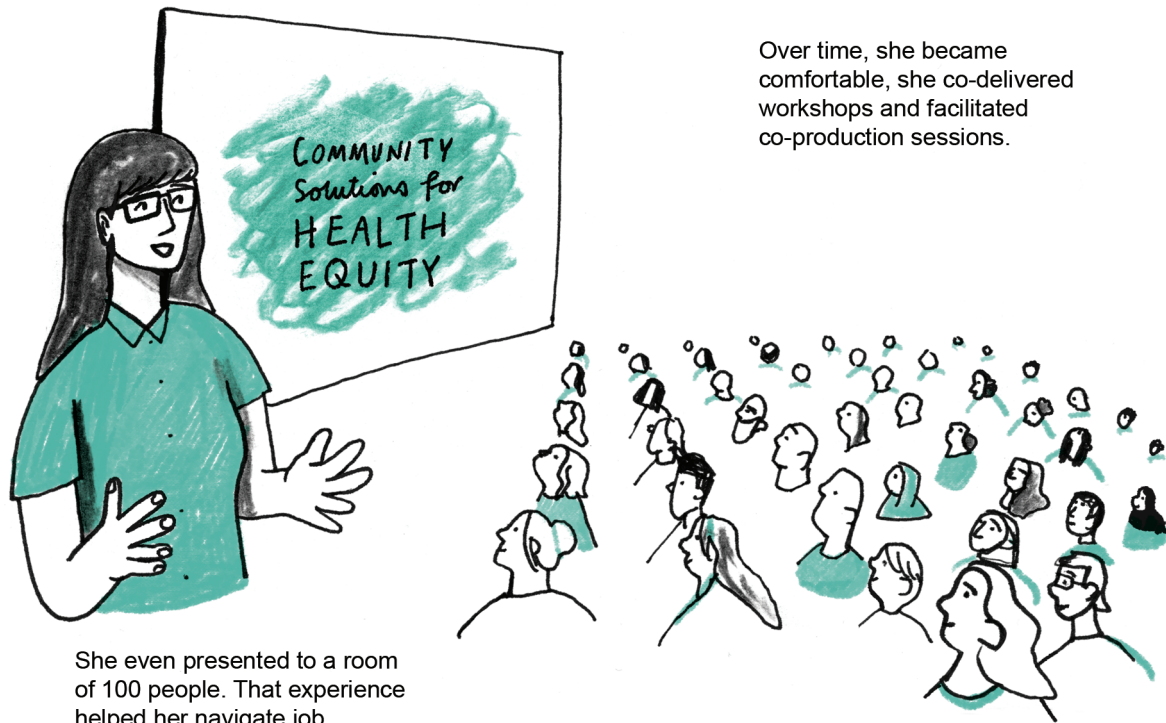
Another co-researcher, who initially felt too nervous to speak even in small groups, gradually developed confidence and public speaking skills.



Many psychosocial interventions only target individuals, placing emphasis on building resilience of individuals, without addressing the systemic adversities behind their distress. That's like putting a plaster on a deeper wound.



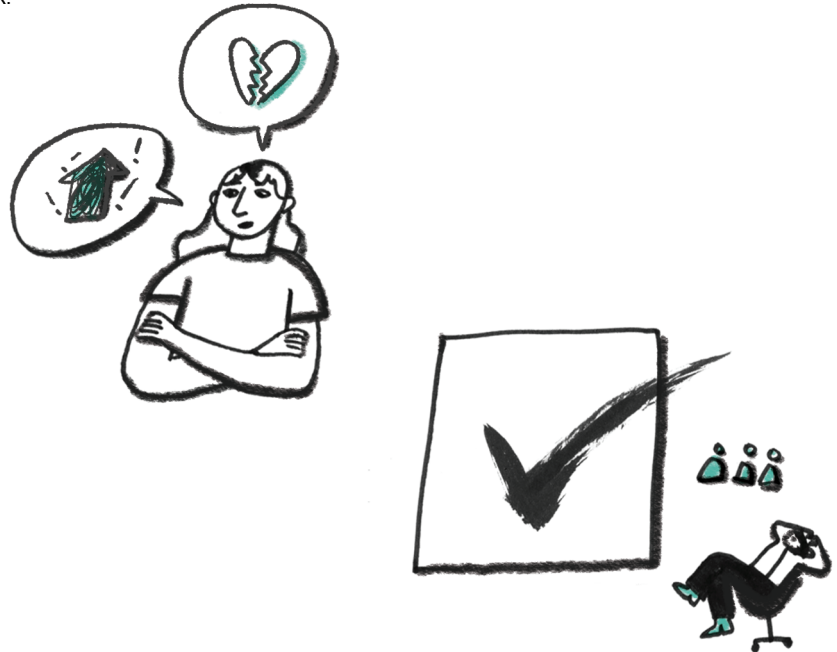
Over time, she became comfortable, she co-delivered workshops and facilitated co-production sessions.



She even presented to a room of 100 people. That experience helped her navigate job interviews and step into new opportunities.

I wanted to do things differently. I started working in ways that pushed the boundaries of what was being done in Turkey at the time. Focusing on politically sensitive work with the Kurdish community there.

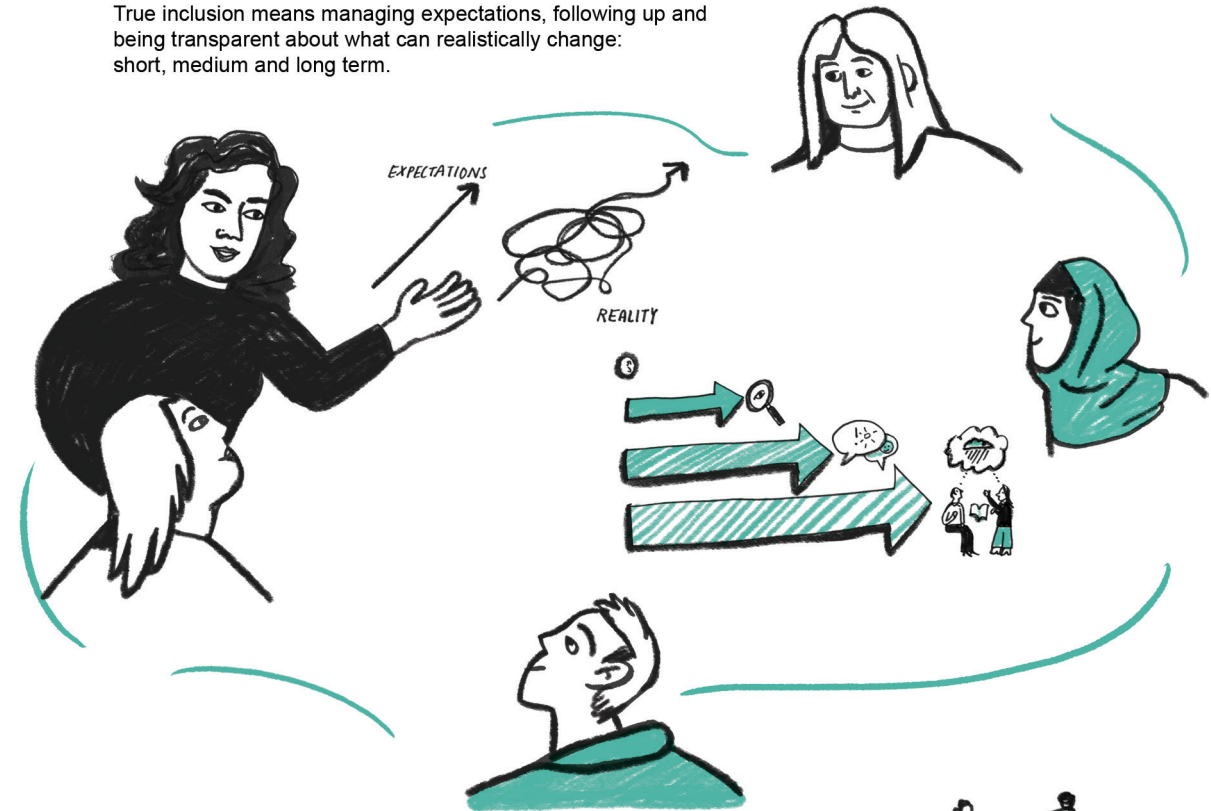
In the UK, co-production is often talked about, but not always done meaningfully. Too often it becomes a tick-box consultation. People are asked for views and then never hear back.



When done poorly, it can cause disappointment, mistrust and learned helplessness.



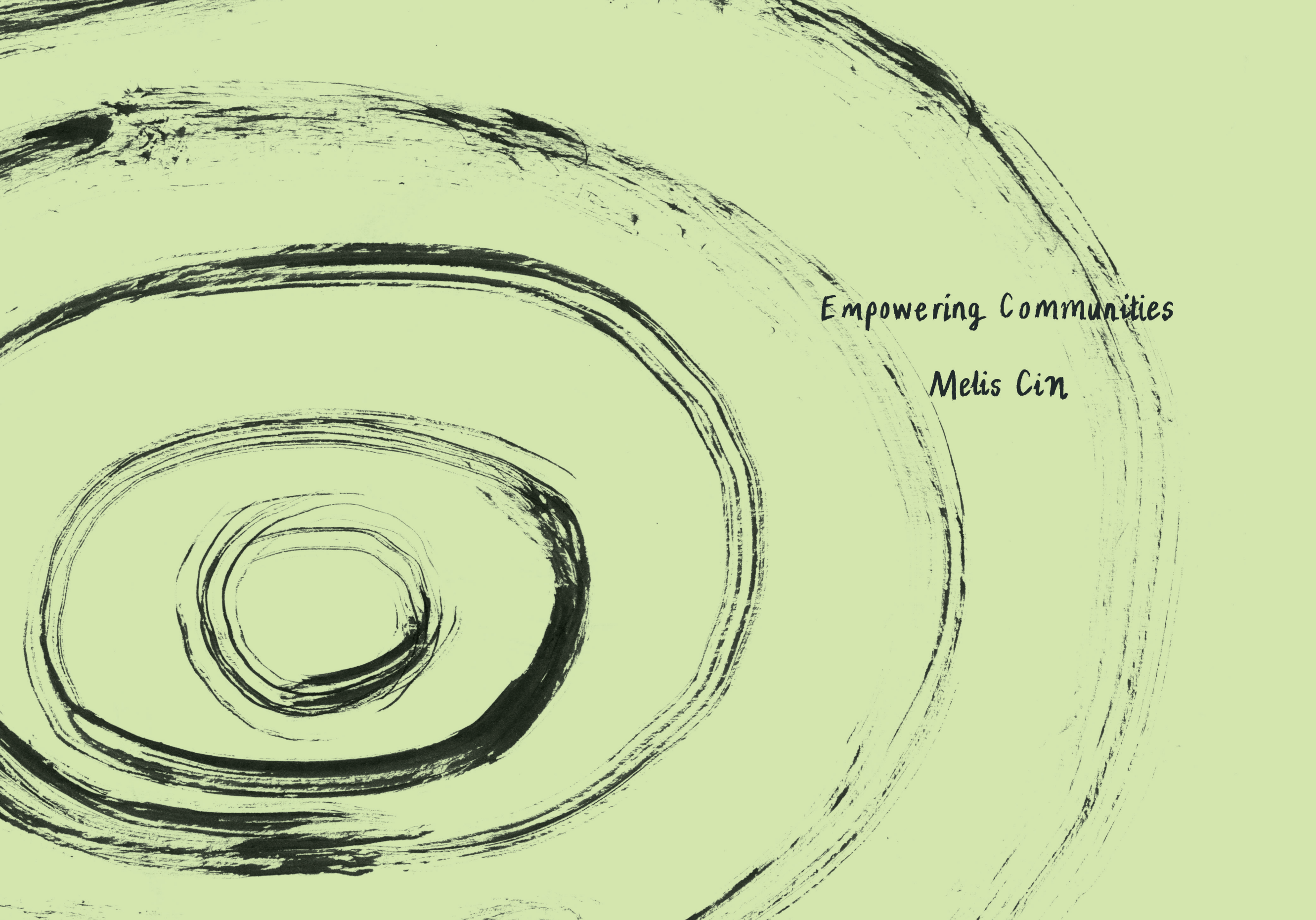
True inclusion means managing expectations, following up and being transparent about what can realistically change: short, medium and long term.



When done well, inclusive research strengthens trust, relevance and impact. To truly make a difference, we must keep asking what co-production is, how, when and under what conditions it works best for communities.



In the future I'd like to bring these research practices back to Turkey to embed co-production there to learn more about the underlying mechanisms and lived experiences there and across the globe.



Empowering Communities

Melis Cin

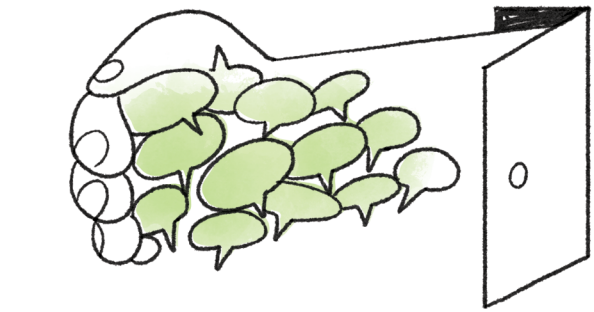


MELIS CIN

If I could change one thing about research culture, it would be less extraction.

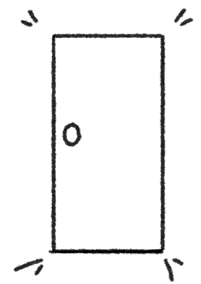
When people are trusted to tell their own stories, they can change the narrative.

Too often I've seen researchers enter a community, extract knowledge and never come back. That extractive approach is unethical and frankly dehumanising.



I made a commitment early on: if I was to work with people, I would always go back.

We would build something together and then build on it again.



In the early years, I learned quickly that research in these contexts is not just about collecting data, it's about listening, returning and continuing.



Every project begins with the same question: What do you want to do?



And every time, the challenge was the same, how do we align the needs and desires of communities with the expectations of funders? Funders have frameworks, outcomes, boxes to tick. Communities have lived realities.



My job was to weave these together without compromising either, a constant balancing act.

One of my favourite projects grew from this approach, Tonga youth from Zimbabwe wanted to rediscover the moringa tree as a pathway for tradition, livelihood and empowerment.



The Moringa tree is a heritage plant rich in Vitamin C and antioxidants, which has a growing market for smoothies, teas, green supplements, and local cosmetics across the globe.



We supported young people to reconnect to traditional farming and tap into the plant's economic potential.



We organised inter-generational workshops: elders shared the farming and uses of moringa (from leaves to powder to traditional relishes.)

The youth voiced that they wanted work they could be proud of, rooted in their land and culture. We supported them to develop small-scale enterprises.



Part of the project design included practical attention to what often gets overlooked: care responsibilities, travel barriers, language and access.



Workshops allowed children to come along, local languages were used, childcare support was provided. Only when participation is accessible can we truly build inclusive economies.

For me, this work is not humanitarian, it's about being a sensible global citizen. As researchers, we have the power, and therefore the responsibility, to change the legacy of extractive research.



We can build equal partnerships — eat the same food, share the same table, co-author the same papers.

In my projects, local partners are always listed as first authors. That's not charity; it's accuracy. They are the experts.

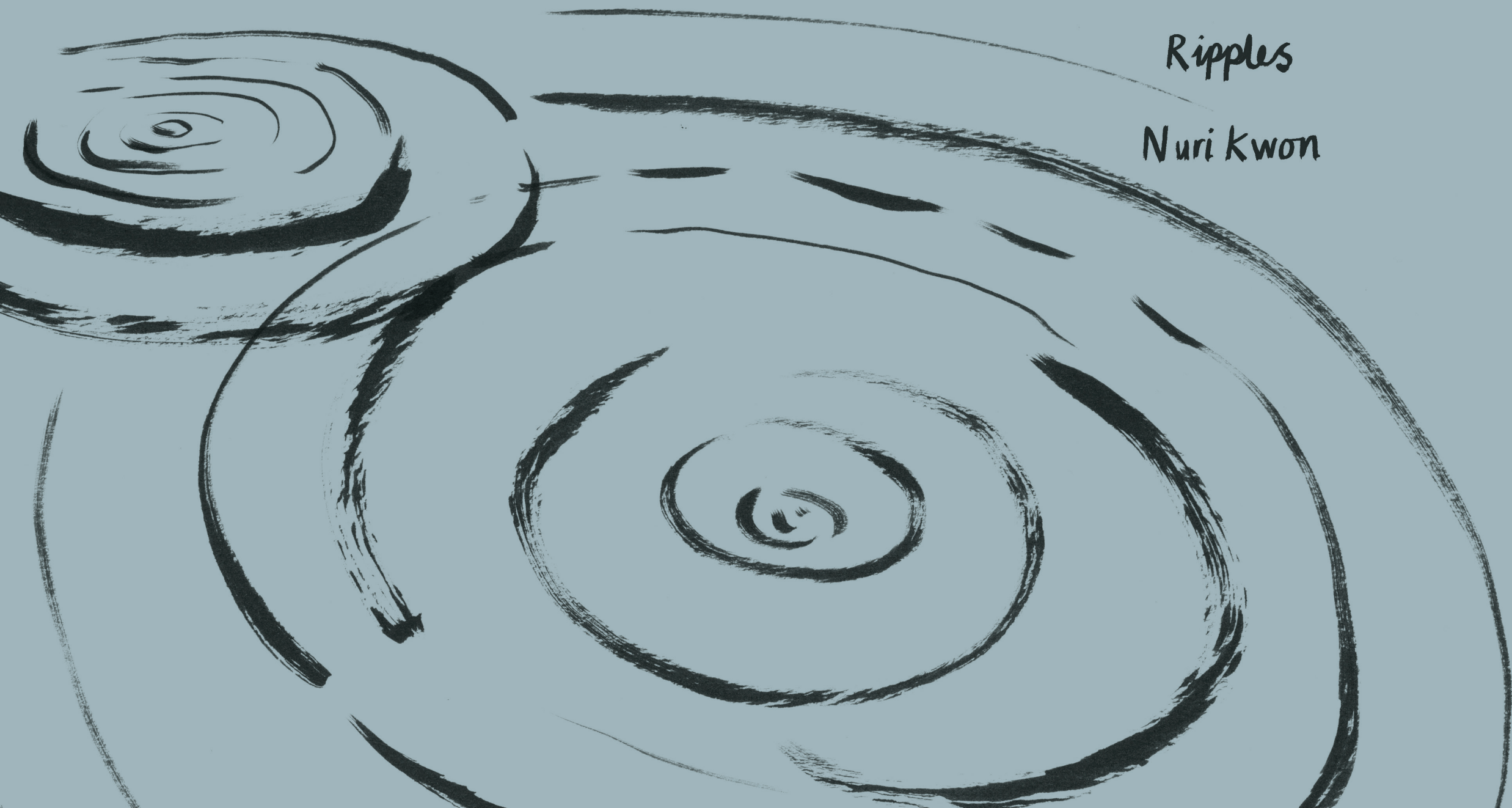


Each project I've been part of has been a reminder that research, when done with care, can be transformative.

Not because it changes people, but because it creates the conditions where they can change things for themselves.

And that, I think, is what real impact looks like.





Ripples

Nuri Kwon

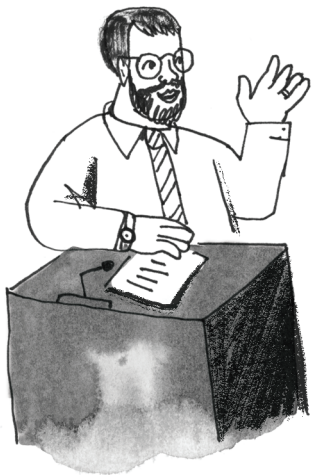
When I started out, I encountered some researchers who didn't really care about people and the impact of their research.

Early in my career, I worked in an office at a University designed to help researchers protect, transfer and commercialise new knowledge.



There, a researcher proudly presented a game for school kids.

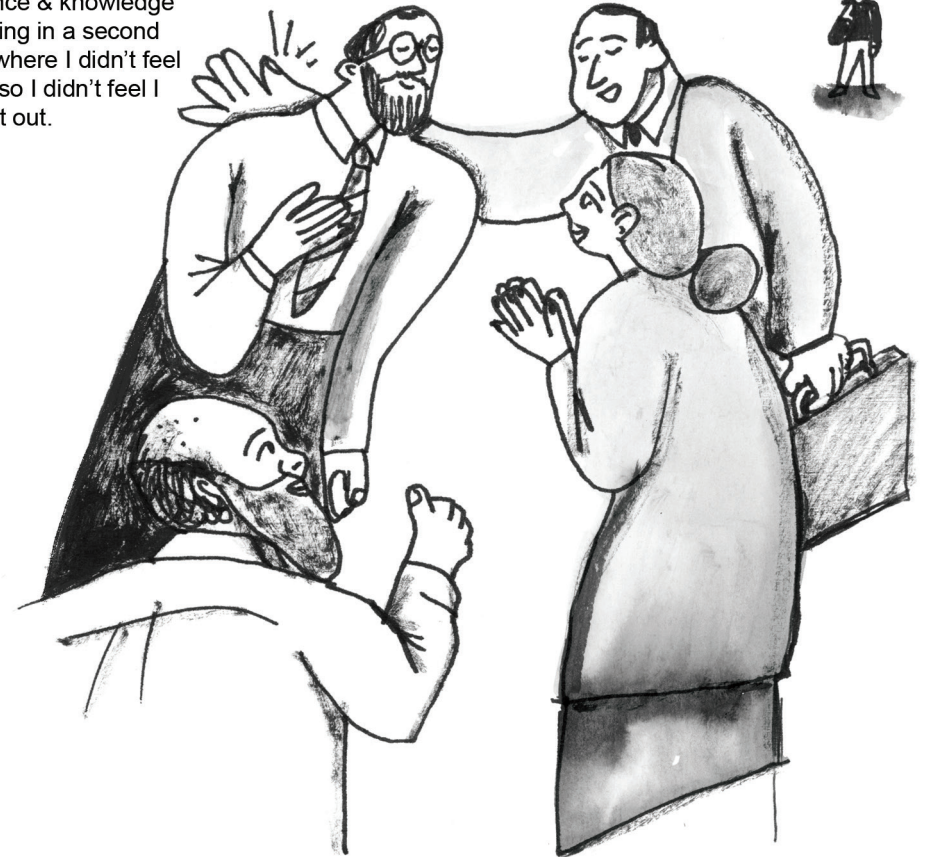
'The game tells their teacher if this kid is going to be a bully or not.'



At that moment, I felt doubtful, as I had no experience in technology transfer. I found myself questioning



No one was questioning him. I was very junior and lacking in experience & knowledge and speaking in a second language where I didn't feel confident, so I didn't feel I could call it out.



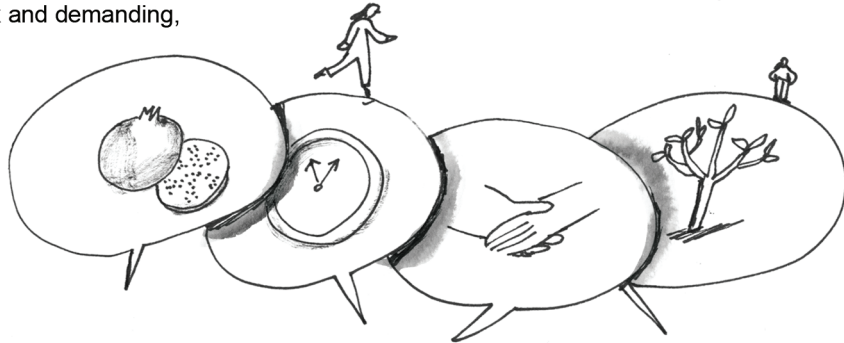
These early experiences of an extractive research culture left me feeling like some researchers don't care about the people they work with and the impact of their research.

Through the conversations the Reimagining Research Practices Project has enabled, I realised how naive I had been. Community-based research is complex and demanding,

but it is also driven by people who care deeply and who genuinely strive to work inclusively across these varied disciplines.

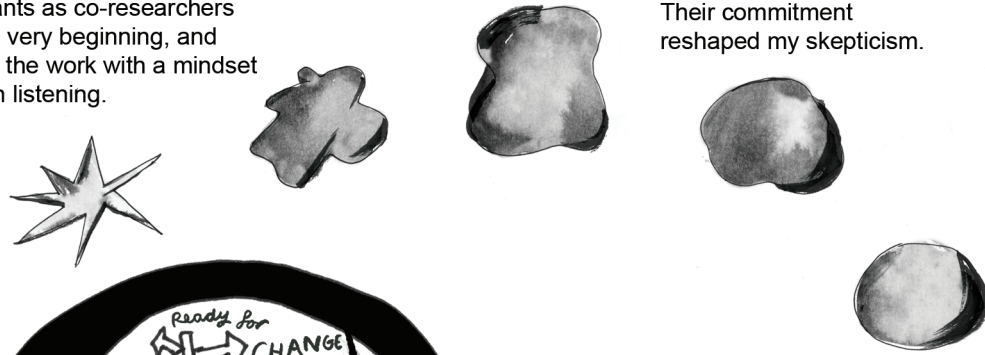
These stories revealed both the potential and the challenges of inclusive research. By hearing these stories, I have a deeper understanding of best practices to bring into my own research practice.

And by sharing them here I hope we can collectively build a research culture that is more genuinely inclusive.

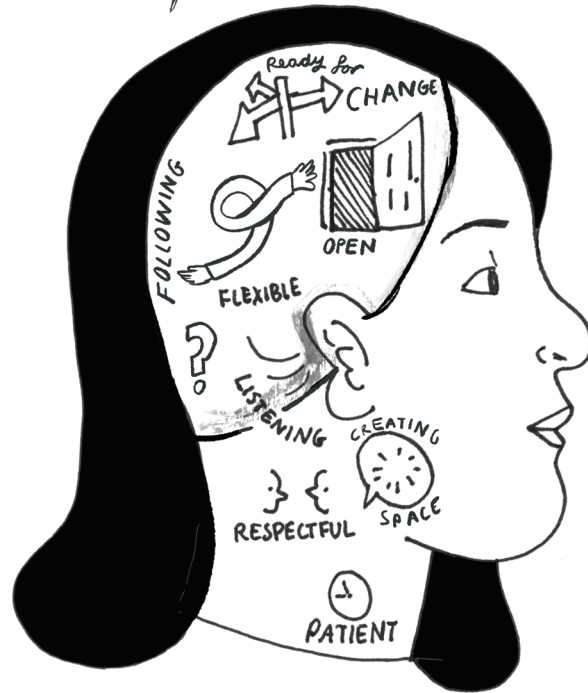


They taught me what truly matters: taking time to build relationships, involving participants as co-researchers from the very beginning, and entering the work with a mindset rooted in listening.

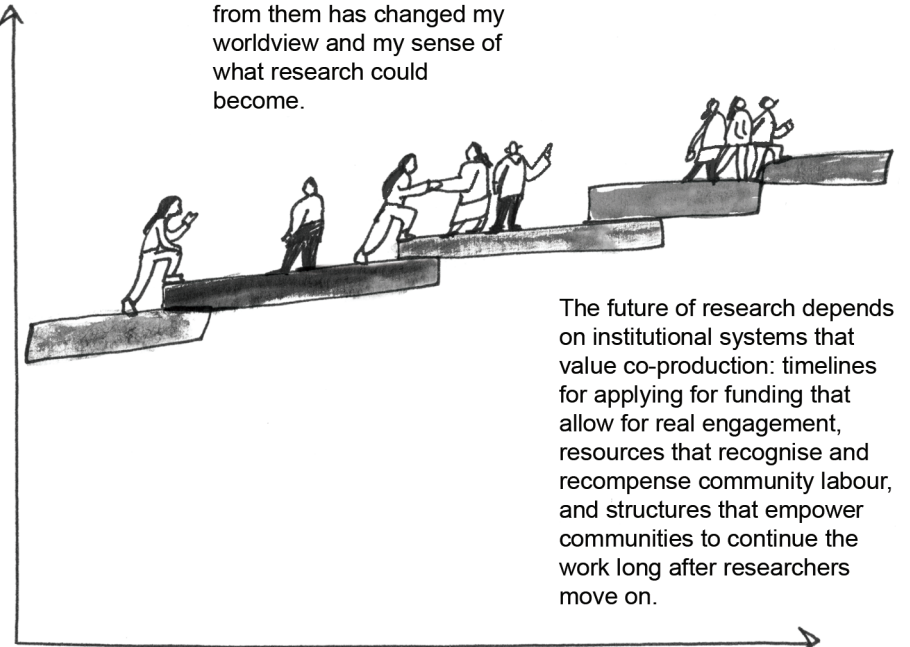
Their commitment reshaped my skepticism.



I've been inspired by every researcher I met, too many to include here. Learning from them has changed my worldview and my sense of what research could become.

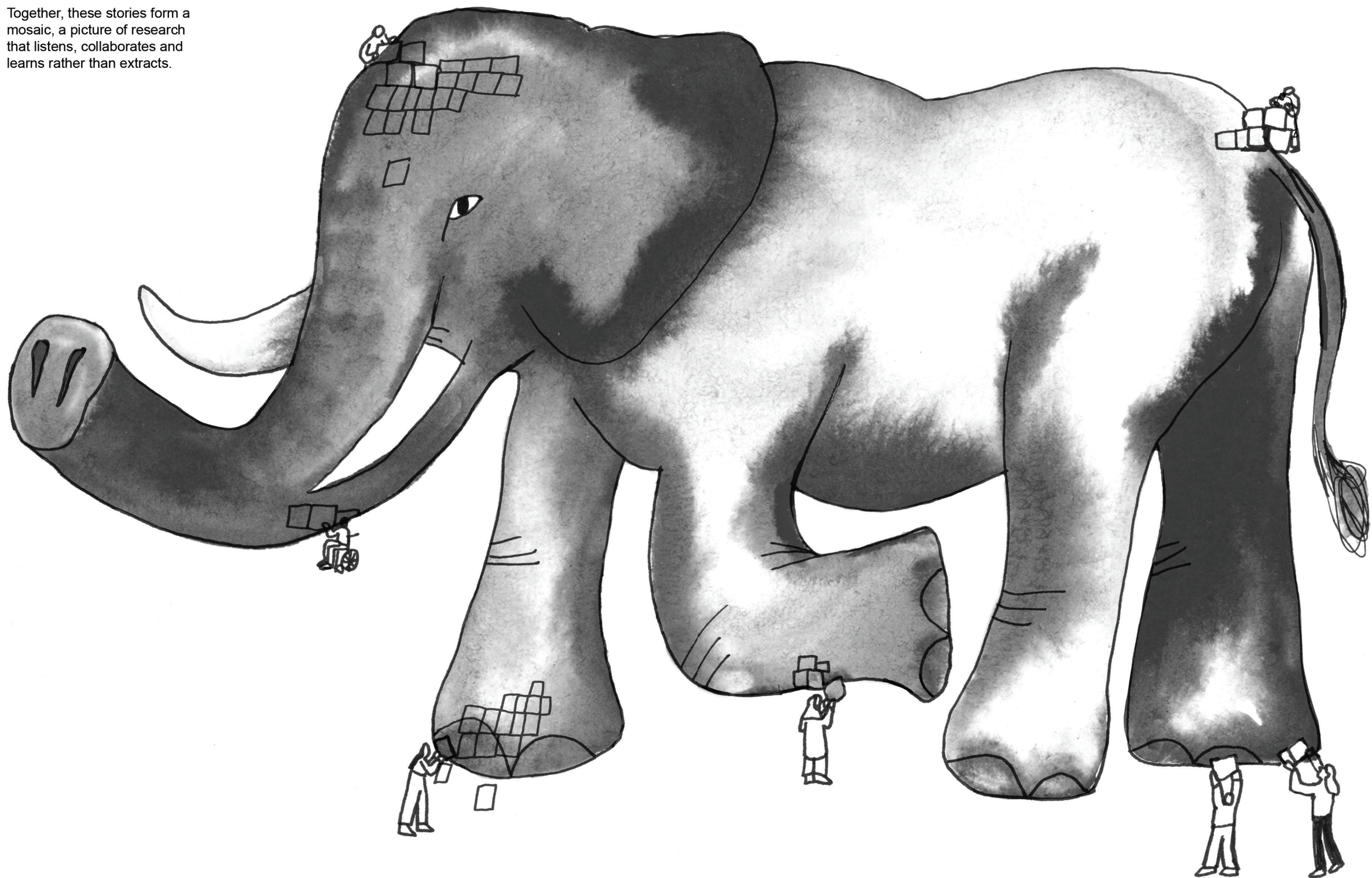


As Carlos put it,
 "The Community already HAS a voice.
 OUR ROLE is to LISTEN."



The future of research depends on institutional systems that value co-production: timelines for applying for funding that allow for real engagement, resources that recognise and recompense community labour, and structures that empower communities to continue the work long after researchers move on.

Together, these stories form a mosaic, a picture of research that listens, collaborates and learns rather than extracts.



Many of these stories speak to all three of our pillars of focus for the Reimagining Research Practices Project.

The project has enabled all these conversations to happen.



The projects in these pages show what becomes possible when research starts with communities rather than simply studying them. Their impacts ripple outward like stones across water, reaching far beyond their origins.

This is the research culture we can build next: one in which diverse voices shape the questions we ask, the processes we co-create, and the future.



What ties these stories together isn't just the work itself, but the people behind it. This is a celebration of a diverse research team and their unique perspectives, motivations and ways of seeing the world, that challenges the status quo of research culture.

FURTHER READING

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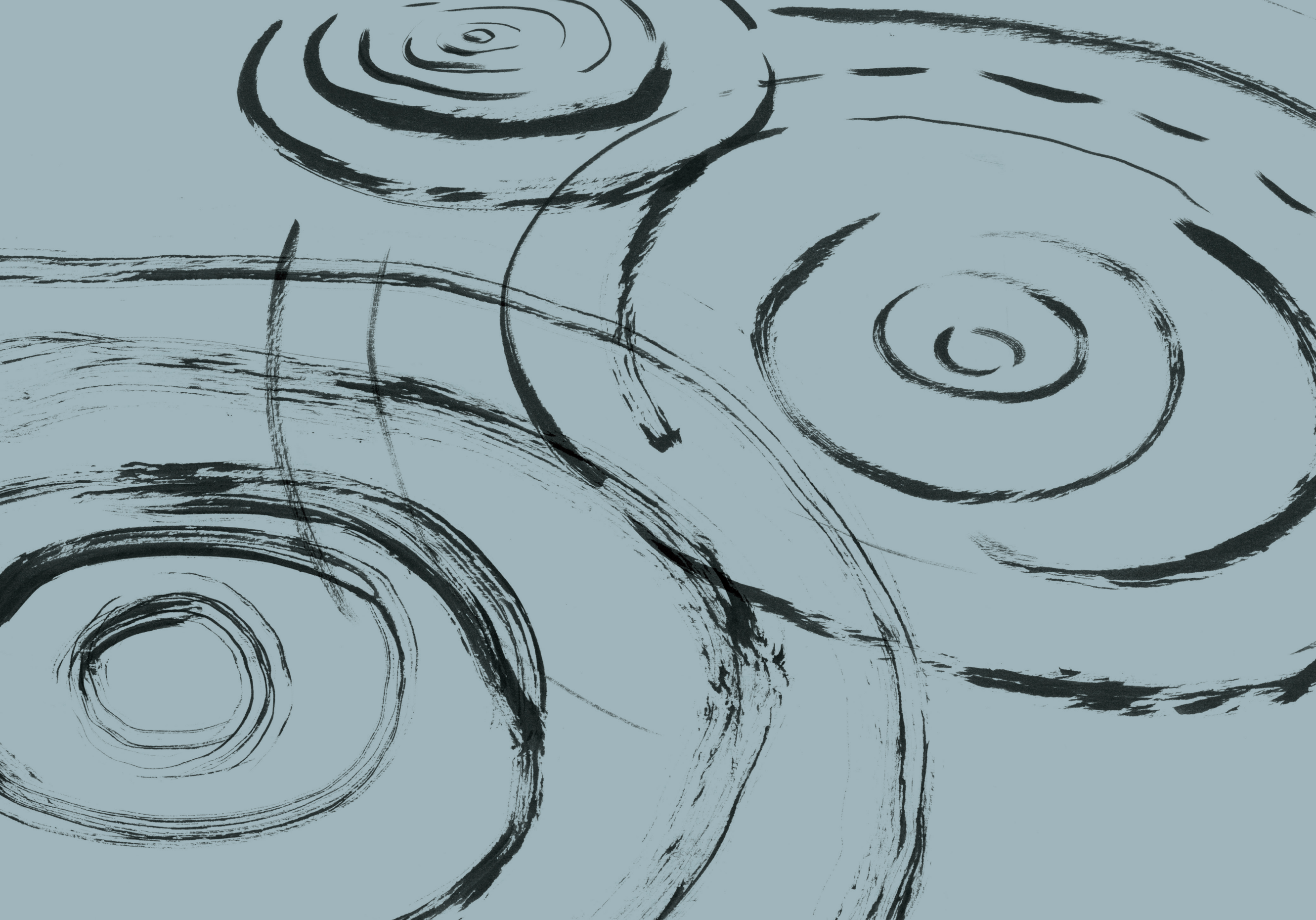
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Pebbles & Ripples is a graphic journey into how research can be done differently. Through nine interwoven stories, researchers and communities reveal the power of listening, care and collaboration. From informal settlements to classrooms, hospitals to community kitchens, small acts of co creation send ripples through broken systems - imagining a more ethical, inclusive and human way of making knowledge together.

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