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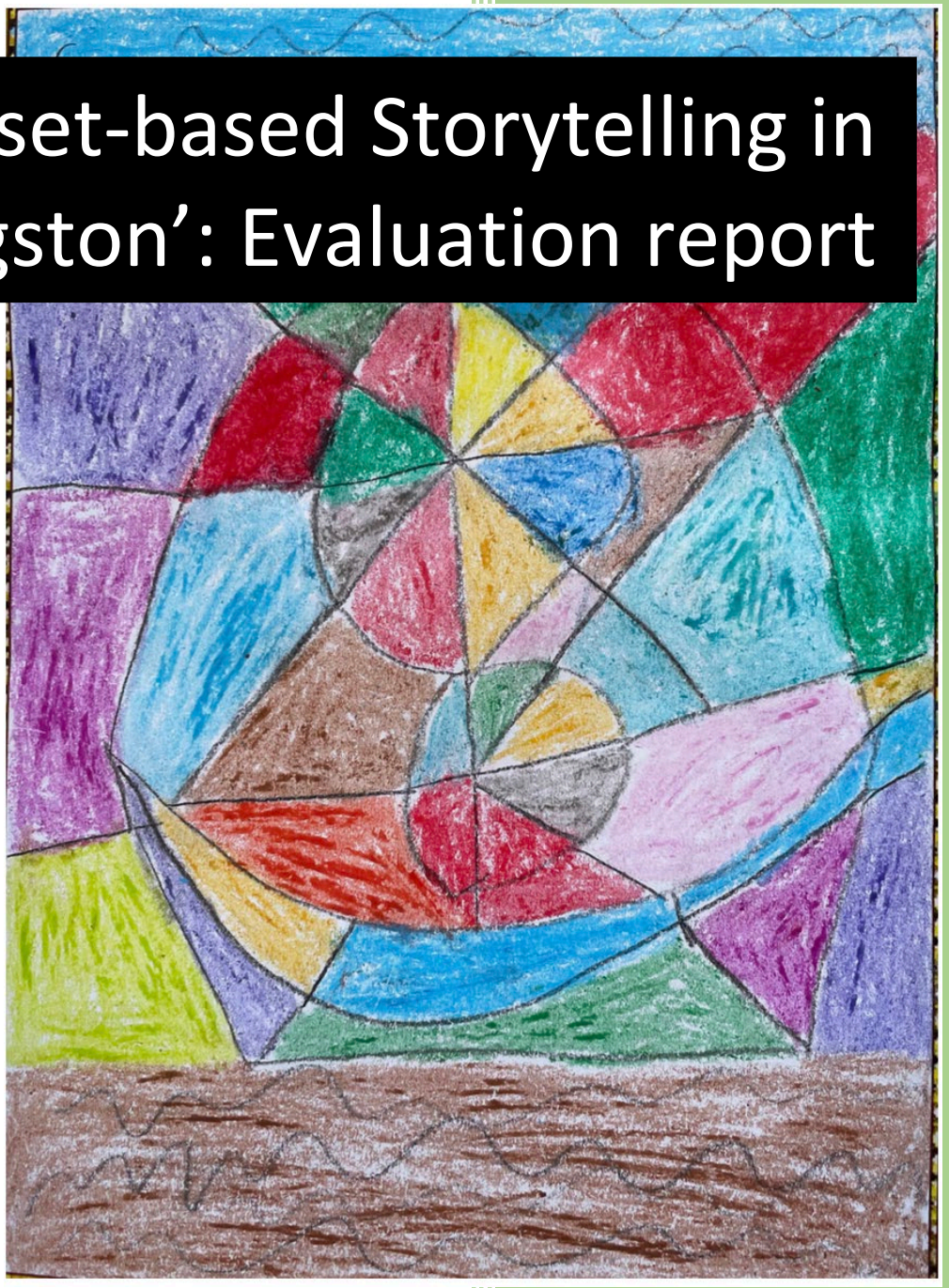
‘Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston’: Evaluation report



Alexander Laffer and
Maria Chatzichristodoulou
Kingston University
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‘Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston’: Evaluation report

Dr Alexander Laffer (Kingston University)
Prof Maria Chatzichristodoulou (Kingston University)

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the evaluation of a year-long project, ‘Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston’, funded by Arts Council England and conducted in partnership by Kingston Libraries, Kingston University, and the professional storyteller Richard Neville. Taking a participant-led and collaborative approach to storytelling, a programme of sessions was designed and run for 7 community-based organisations that supported members with diverse needs, ranging from people with learning disabilities or mental health issues to those struggling with trauma or addiction.

The project was evaluated using a Theory of Change that identified key change mechanisms, outcomes, and impacts. Observations, interviews, and workshops were conducted with participants and staff members to enable the evaluation. The project was found to be highly successful with several important benefits for participants, including improving wellbeing, providing access to culture, and supporting skills development. In particular, the storytelling sessions created a safe space for participants who felt marginalised by society, encouraging a belief in the value of their experiences, giving them confidence to develop their own ‘voice’, and validating their desire to share their stories with a wider community audience.

There were also benefits for partner organisations with sessions being used to support and further institutional aims, often offering something beyond organisations’ existing activities.

The project also represents a positive step towards Kingston Libraries longer term transformational goal of becoming a community creative hub – although this requires continued nurturing to see this through. However, combining the growing network of community organisations, with the development of a storytelling toolkit provides an excellent foundation for continued storytelling activities that forms a key strand of this transformation.

Cover illustration by Paul from Kingston Mencap

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1. Introduction

'[Storytelling is] a thread of experience that you weave' (Participant from Hestia)

This report provides an evaluation of Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston – a community storytelling project run by Kingston Libraries in partnership with Richard Neville, a professional storyteller, and Kingston University. It was funded by Arts Council England with a grant of £41,482 and ran from July 2021 to November 2022.[1]

The project involved collaborative storytelling sessions that were designed and delivered with staff and participants from seven community organisations, supporting members with varied needs. The aim of the project was to engage audiences in the development of their own storytelling practice, enabling them to extend social networks, develop creative partnerships, enhance wellbeing, and increase access to culture. The project also aimed to engage organisations in experiences of collaboration and cultural exploration, leading to future partnerships with RBK Libraries and other partner organisations.

Alongside benefits to participants and community organisations, the project sought to test four principles identified in a previously commissioned piece of research, *A reimagined Kingston Library Service* (2020), that would contribute to the development of the library as a community and creative hub. These were:

- We will make the most of every opportunity to develop our offer, enabling libraries to reach all of Kingston's communities, and support and inspire in new ways.
- Our physical library spaces will be flexible, providing a quality core offer whilst also providing space for our communities to share and participate in creative and community-led activities.
- We will nurture and grow new partnerships with other agencies and community groups, enabling the service to develop and reach a wider audience.
- Library staff are supported, empowered and skilled in community development and outreach, supporting residents when they need us.

A framework for evaluation was developed using a theory of change (ToC), created in tandem with the project team and incorporating feedback from partner organisation staff, volunteers, and participants. The ToC also took into consideration project aims and objectives as articulated in the project funding application.

Based on the theory of change, the following impact statements were generated as evaluation markers to measure the success of the project:

1. Create a template for future storytelling activities and develop tools, materials, and resources to provide sustained and sustainable support for non-facilitated storytelling.
2. Build and maintain relationships between Kingston Libraries, Community Groups and their members; creating a network for storytelling, shared activities, and future projects.

[1] The project was initially designated to run for a year but received an extension due to the impact of the Covid Pandemic. The Kingston Borough council notice of programme can be found here: https://www.kingston.gov.uk/news/article/179/the-power-of-storytelling-giving-communities-a-voice

3. Enable Library and Partner staff/volunteers to become advocates for storytelling, understanding how it can contribute to the delivery of services.
4. Contribute to the transformation of the library into a community hub, by providing space (creative and physical) for storytelling activities and projects, strengthening connections between the library, community groups and their individual members.
5. Participants feel empowered to share their stories and storytelling becomes a positive resource in their lives. Sessions and future activities contribute to improved personal wellbeing, social skills, and creative expression for participants.

The purpose of this report is to signal what the project has achieved, discuss what went well and highlight areas for improvement. Further, it will consider the value and impact of the project for three identified groups A) Kingston Libraries; B) Partner organisations; and C) Participants engaged in the storytelling activities. It also provides some thoughts on future projects and how to sustain storytelling activities.

To achieve its aims, the evaluation took a mixed method approach to triangulate findings across varied stakeholder perspectives, who had differing needs and varying involvement with the project. To do so, we combined observations of storytelling sessions, interviews with key participants and partner staff, evaluation workshops, and an impact workshop focussing on the development of a toolkit. Evaluators familiarised themselves with the data and performed thematic analysis to find key points of interest across the data sets. These were then considered in relation to the theory of change and identified impact markers.

After this introduction, this report will be structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides the background to the project.
- Section 3 presents the theory of change.
- Section 4 details the methodology taken to collect and analyse the data as well as an overview of key themes from the data.
- Section 5 relates findings back to the impact statements, identifying successes and areas for improvement.
- Section 6 concludes and looks forward to potential future work.

2. Background

The Project

'Asset-based storytelling in Kingston' emerged from prior research conducted by Kingston Libraries (Re-imagining Kingston Libraries, 2020) that explored how their service should develop to meet the needs of its users over the next decade. In this report, the libraries were envisioned as community hubs, providing access to a number of resources to encourage social, cultural, and creative activities. To explore this possibility, storytelling was suggested as an initial approach, and so the current project was designed to co-create storytelling programmes with community organisations.

Those involved included:

- The Kingston Libraries project team (Fiona Tarn, Anita Lewis, Marion Tessier)
- A professional storyteller (Richard Neville)
- Partner organisations and their users/clients
- The evaluation team from Kingston University (Prof Maria Chatzichristodoulou, Dr Alexander Laffer).

Partner Organisations

A number of organisations were approached, with the deliberate aim of engaging diverse community members representing a range of needs and backgrounds. It was originally planned to partner with 8 organisations. However, due to the bespoke nature of the sessions and the additional sessions run by the facilitator, ultimately seven organisations took part:

a) MENCAP, a charity supporting people with learning disabilities.
b) BALANCE, an employment support service for people with learning, physical or sensory disabilities.
c) MIND, a mental health charity
d) HESTIA, a charity supporting those in and recovering from times of crisis.
e) The Pearl Project, a project working with women who have been through abuse (run by Voices of Hope).
f) Refugee Action Kingston (RAK), a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers.
g) The Joel Stabilisation Centre (run by Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness, KCAH), a supported residential home for those who have experienced homelessness and addiction.[2]

Each group and individual had specific needs, motivations and experiences that shaped their engagement with the project. However, it is analytically useful to characterise participants as falling within three categories: 1) those getting support for learning disabilities (a-b); 2) those recovered/recovering from past trauma or dealing with mental health issues but in stable

[2] Early in the project, the residents of the Joel Centre were informed that it would be closing a year earlier than planned. This added additional uncertainty to their already somewhat unstable lives as they attempted to transition back into mainstream community.

environments (c-f); 3) those still engaging with past trauma in non-stable environments or uncertain contexts (f-g). [3]

Storytelling Programmes

Each programme was originally envisaged as taking place over six sessions. However, in practice, the storyteller took a flexible, responsive, and adaptive approach to delivering the programmes, meaning many exceeded this original estimate with additional sessions provided. The sessions were either incorporated into existing scheduled meetings (such as drop-ins or weekly activities) that had existing membership or created as a new activity, promoted by staff members to potential participants.

The programmes were co-designed with participants, with initial input from partner facilitators (i.e., the member of staff liaising with Kingston Libraries). This was a conscious decision by Richard Neville, the professional storyteller, to best attend to the needs of the participants and to encourage a focus on participant assets. Once the facilitator gained some insight into the participants, he provided the following programme types:

a) MENCAP: Interactive storytelling: the facilitator suggested a theme and began to perform a story based on this theme, while encouraging interaction and participation. At a key juncture, participants would be asked to provide visual (drawn) responses to a prompt relevant to the story. For example, in a story about superheroes, participants were asked what their superpower would be and to draw themselves with this power. The responses were then incorporated into the story being performed by the facilitator.
b) BALANCE: Collaborative storytelling using Books Beyond Words. These are illustrated non-verbal stories that encourage discussion and interpretation of what is happening in the images. Books were selected that presented different social interactions to support the development of interpersonal and social skills.
c) MIND: Activities and discussions around a weekly theme (ranging from Nature to Storytelling memories). Participants were invited and encouraged to engage in oral storytelling and would contribute their own responses to the theme.
d) HESTIA: Combination of creative writing and shared oral storytelling. Due to the varying aims of the participants both shared and reflected on their own and others' experiences through discussion but also conducted writing activities, such as responding to paintings.
e) Pearl Project (Voices of Hope): Creative writing focussed sessions. These drew on a combination of methods, for example, using visual prompts such as storytelling cards, and 'writing in the garden' sessions, using nature as a stimulus for storytelling,
f) RAK: Playful language learning through creative expression. These sessions explored several different creative genres (e.g., parable, poetry, puppetry) to encourage personal reflection, creativity and to scaffold and support development of language and communication skills.
g) Joel Centre (KCAH): Combination of creative writing and shared oral storytelling. Initial sessions were conducted over Zoom and tended to be more structured, focussed on a writing activity involving a visual or verbal prompt. Later sessions were face-to-face and encouraged greater sharing of experiences by adopting a discussion-based form of storytelling.

[3] There was some variation in the situation and experiences of participants from Refugee Action Kingston. They have therefore been given a liminal categorisation.

Session outputs

The sessions encouraged a range of creative outputs. Where appropriate, these were collected and collated by the storyteller to produce a book for the programme, representing the participants' experience of the sessions. Different examples of these outputs can be found in the appendices: MENCAP appendices 1-3; KCAH appendix 4; RAK appendix 5; Pearl Project appendix 6.

Note on format

The biggest modification to the original project plans was due to Covid-19, which necessitated changes to the delivery format. Until March 2022, all session were conducted remotely which influenced the style and success of the sessions (see section 5) and raised further issues around access to technology, digital skills, and the attendant capacity to identify need and provide appropriate digital resources. This will be discussed in the report.

3. Evaluation framework: Theory of Change

The rationale for evaluating the project was multi-fold:

1) To provide an ongoing process of feeding back to project members to ensure activities remained connected to outcomes and impact.
2) To assess the overall impact of the project, the value to participants and degree of success in meeting Kingston Libraries' aims.
3) To support the development of a storytelling toolkit to empower future facilitators to deliver sessions without the need to have a professional storyteller present.

As we were treating evaluation as a continuous process, we developed a theory of change (ToC) to use as an evaluative framework for the project. Theories of change have come to replace traditional logic models for evaluation because they encourage a more complex and dynamic understanding of how projects (and stakeholders) work to achieve impact. This is achieved by focussing on causality across timescales, exploring how achievements at the micro-level (change mechanisms) contribute to short-term outcomes and long-term impacts.

Through discussion with stakeholders, observation of activities, and engagement with key documents, the ToC surfaced the motivations of the project team and stakeholders and their ambitions for the project. These provided the goals against which the project's actual achievements could be measured.

ToCs can vary in how they are employed and how they categorise different elements. I adapted NPC's (2019) ten step approach as a comprehensive framework that includes (or considers) most categories found in other theories of change. The categories explored include:

- Situation Analysis (including identified issues)
- Target groups
- Activities
- Change Mechanisms (immediate benefits)
- Outcomes (short term benefits)
- Impacts (long term benefits)
- Assumptions
- External Factors.

The following is a selected discussion of the Theory of Change, focussing on issues to be addressed by the project (3.1 Situation Analysis) and the benefits emerging from project activities (3.1 Change Mechanisms, Outcomes, and Impacts). These will be considered in turn below, including the five impact statements that formed the main benchmark for evaluating the project.

Discussion of assumptions and external factors are not included here. However, they were used by the team to during delivery to pre-empt or overcome issues that emerged and so enhance the potential for beneficial outcomes and impacts.

3.1 Situation Analysis

Focussing on three key stakeholder groups, the following issues were identified that underpin the project:

a) Library:

This is a time of transition for Library services with changes in status and funding, including the recent closure of many library branches across the UK. To meet these challenges, Kingston libraries continues to explore how to develop and improve its offer to best meet the needs of the community.

b) Partners:

There was variation between partner organisations, but the problems they sought to address generally fit into two categories: provision of activities, including extending reach (**engagement**), and improvements and benefits for their clients/members (**development**); the latter relating to personal wellbeing, social relationships, and skills development.

c) Participants

As above, there is variation inter and intra-groups. However, in terms of the project, their problems can be framed as emerging from limited access to resources (**access**) and the desire to improve personal wellbeing, social relationships, and skills development (**needs**).

It also became clear that many participants, across different groups, saw storytelling activities as a means of doing identity work, processing life experiences and as an avenue to present their marginalised perspectives (**voice**).

These stakeholder issues can be combined into the following problem statements:

How can we use storytelling to help Kingston Libraries to develop their offer and contribute to the engagement, development, access and needs of myriad participants and community groups?

How can we improve social and cultural skills for participants, while engaging community organisations in collaborative endeavours to inform and contribute to the change of libraries into community hubs?

3.2 Change Mechanisms, Outcomes, and Impacts

The project was designed to address the above problems through storytelling activities, as well as through the production of creative outputs and a storytelling toolkit. To better evaluate its success, proposed benefits were explored taking in three different timescales:

- Change Mechanisms: immediate effects that occur during or emerge soon after project activities.
- Outcomes: shorter term gains that develop throughout the project. These might be considered in terms of skills or assets that participants and/or stakeholders gain.
- Impact: longer term aims emerging from the project and sustained beyond the end of the project.

For the theory of change, we started by generating impact statements that set out what we wanted the legacy of the project to be. Working backwards, we considered what outcomes needed to be in place to lead to sustained impact, and then what needed to be achieved during storytelling activities to support these outcomes.

3.2.1 Impacts

The five impact statements were:

1. **Create a template for future storytelling activities and develop tools, materials and resources to provide sustained and sustainable support for non-facilitated storytelling.**
2. **Build and maintain relationships between Kingston Libraries, Community Groups and their members; creating a network for storytelling, shared activities and future projects.**
3. **Library and Partner staff/volunteers become advocates for storytelling, understanding how it can contribute to the delivery of services.**
4. **Contribute to the transformation of the library into a community hub, by providing space (creative and physical) for storytelling activities and projects, strengthening connections between the library, community groups and their individual members.**
5. **Participants feel empowered to share their stories and storytelling becomes a positive resource in their lives. Sessions and future activities contribute to improved personal wellbeing, social skills, and creative expression for participants.**

3.2.2 Outcomes

As discussed, impacts are contingent on the successful delivery of shorter-term outcomes. These project outcomes were identified for each of the key groups as follows, with relevance to impacts indicated by (#):

Participants:

- Increased confidence in articulating thoughts and ideas and further understanding of the value of their experiences and storytelling. (1; 2; **5**)
- Development of storytelling and other skills (e.g., language) (1; 3; 5)
- Increased feelings of belonging to a group of like-minded people (2; 4; **5**)
- Sense of achievement through creative output and skills development; contributing to further activity and mutual support. (1; 2; 4; **5**)
- Shift in participants' focus from negative personal accounting to an asset-based evaluation of their lives. (**5**)
- Enhanced eagerness to contribute to future storytelling activities (2; 3; 4; **5**)

These outputs would be achieved through an evolving creative practice and the production of meaningful creative outputs as the sessions progress.

Partner organisations:

- Greater insights into participant needs and experiences through participation in storytelling sessions. (2; **3**; 5)
- Understanding of how to facilitate storytelling. (**1**; 2; 3)
- Greater links to the library and access to community resources. (2; **4**)

Kingston Library:

- Enhanced profile for the library and services, including outreach to non-users. (2; **4**)
- Greater service usage from enhanced awareness with current users and outreach to non-users. (2; 3; **4**)
- Improved links between library service and partner organisations for future partnership working. (**2**; 3; 4)
- Raised profile of library service with partner organisations, so they think of us the library as a first-choice partner (**2**; 4)

3.2.3 Change Mechanisms

These are much shorter-term processes and gains that occur during or emerge soon after project activities.

From engaging with the storytelling sessions, it was hoped that participants would:

- Gain insights into storytelling/writing/creativity (1; 5)
- Engage in personal and collective creative work (1; 5)
- Gain inspiration for creative projects (1)
- Reflect on their own and others' work (2; 5)
- Be listened to and feel understood and heard (5)
- Feel positive emotions (e.g., excitement; happiness). (5)
- Feel liberated from their situation (and not defined by their problems and limitations) (5)
- Gain confidence and believe they have something to contribute (1; 5)
- Believe they can add value to the sessions (and their communities). (2; 4; 5)
- Understand they have skills/assets that others don't have (4, 5)

Contribution to group creative outputs (such as books) and attendance at project events were identified as acting as reinforcers and extenders for change mechanisms. It was hoped that these transition processes, which provided a bridge between change mechanisms and outcomes, could lead to the following effects:

- Reinforce feelings of self-worth (5)
- Provide a means to preserve participant voices and stories (1; 2; 3; 4; 5)
- Encourage further positive emotional response from seeing work in print (1; 5)
- Demonstrate to partner organisations the value of the storytelling sessions (1; 2; 3)
- Create an environment for networking and cross-collaboration. (1; 2; 3; 4; 5)

Figure 1 is a simplified diagram of the Theory of Change highlighting key processes and interactions. The full theory of change was used as a project map, to provide guidance during delivery and evaluation. We will now turn to how the data was collected and analyzed to enable the evaluation.

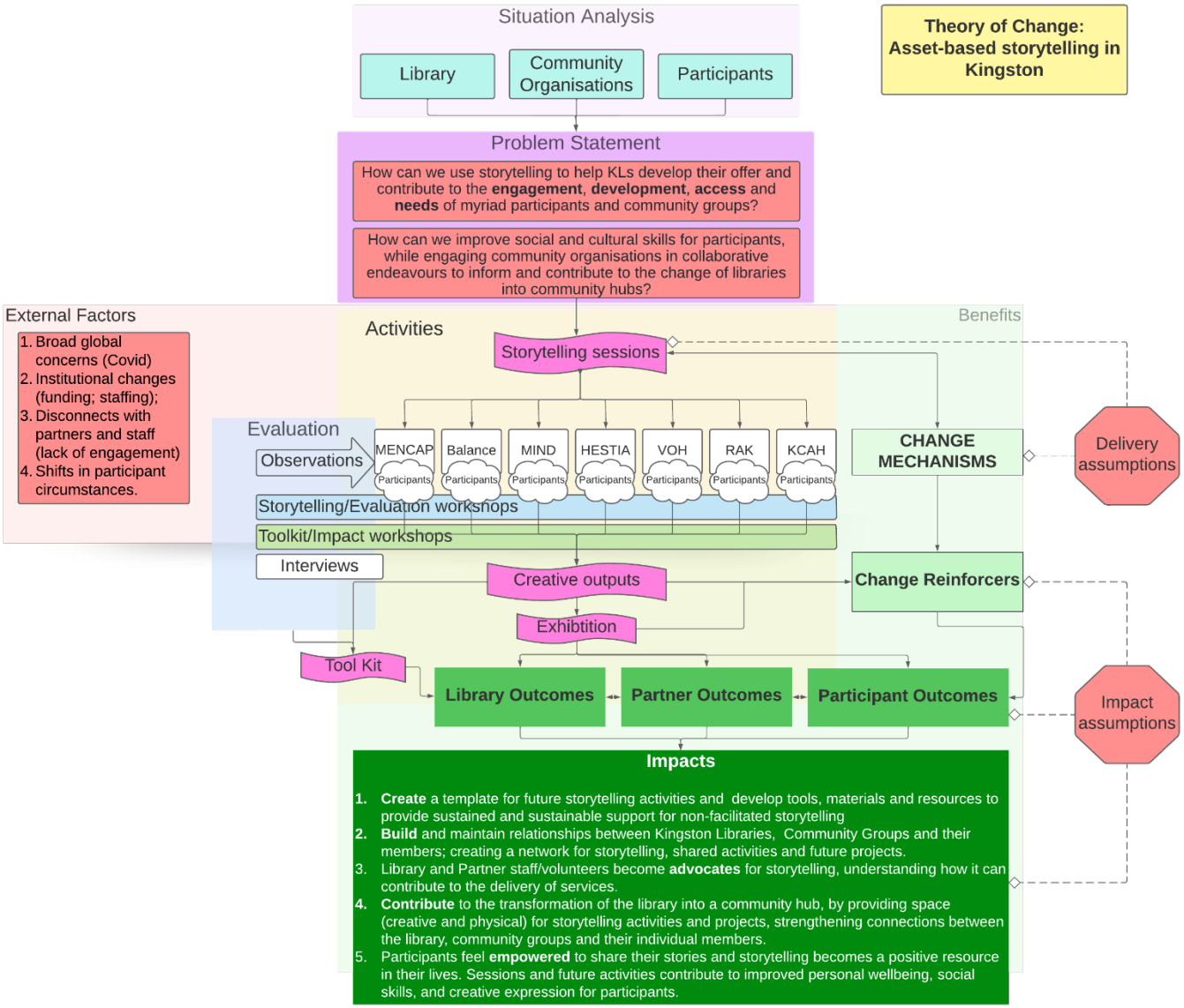


Figure 1: Theory of Change

4 Methodology and Findings

The evaluation was overseen by Maria Chatzichristodoulou of Kingston University, who also observed sessions for Hestia and The Pearl Project. Alexander Laffer managed the day-to-day tasks of the evaluation, including observing storytelling sessions for the other groups, facilitating the creation of the theory of change, conducting evaluation workshops, impact focus groups and interviews with staff and participants.

The evaluation was conducted in the following stages:

- Preparation and Planning
- Initial **observations** of storytelling sessions
- Determining key evaluation indicators
- Creating Theory of Change (in discussion with project team)
- Collecting data
    - Further **observations** of storytelling sessions
    - **Workshops** with storytelling session participants
    - **Interviews** with partner organisation representatives
- Analysing data
- Reporting on findings.

More information on the process of each of the data collection methods (Observations, Workshops, and Interviews) is provided below alongside the main findings.

Data collected was subjected to thematic analysis, with researchers systematically working through the data to identify key points raised. These were then re-read to check for connections and grouped to form initial codes based on patterns in the data. These were refined through further engagement with the data and discussion amongst the team to generate the final themes presented below.

4.2 Observations

Observations were conducted by researchers while taking part in the storytelling sessions. Researchers were active participants in the discussion and contributed to written and performed storytelling activities. This was done to mitigate the distancing and the chilling effect of having an external observer in the room. It was also believed it would better allow the researchers to engage with and understand the different community groups on their own terms. A template used for the observations is included (Appendix 7) with the following sections: Structure; Activities; Techniques; Evaluation; and Additional Notes.

4.2.1 Key Themes

Success of collaborative design

The aim was for the sessions to be designed collaboratively based on participant needs and feedback. This collaborative approach meant that while sessions were facilitator-led, they were guided by the needs and wants of participant groups and individuals. The professional storyteller was successful in:

i. Adjusting tasks to participant requests
ii. Building on participant suggestions
iii. Developing work and activities across sessions

iv. Responding with attention and compassion to participants
v. Engaging at a group and individual level
vi. Ensuring all contributions are valued
vii. Designing and delivering a range of different sessions, using a variety of methods and approaches

The storyteller also provided a variety of different types of storytelling formats during evaluation workshops that fed into the development of the storytelling toolkit.

Skills development

The storyteller worked to modulate writing activities to suit participants, including a general increase in difficulty/complexity of exercises as programmes progressed. Examples include: shifting from thematic to narrative prompts for drawing topics (MENCAP); and moving from sentence level prompts to cohesive narratives (KCAH). This contributed to participants' skill development as improvements in contributions and increased confidence in both interactions and creative work was observed. For example, some participants shifted from diminishing their contributions to expressions of pride in their work alongside wanting to keep and present what they had done. Similarly, Hestia participants talked about developing new skills throughout the sessions, giving them confidence to speak out and speak up.

Creative skills development was most obvious in those groups (Pearl Project) and individuals (Hestia) who had a particular focus on creative writing and/or had the inclination or circumstance to pursue and nurture this development.

Additional development included communication and language skills. For example, a key element of the storytelling activities delivered for RAK was to support English language learning. To achieve this, the facilitator incorporated a number of language learning elements (for example, introducing and glossing key lexical items and checking vocab lists) into the broader storytelling activities.

Enhanced wellbeing

Observation of the sessions revealed evidence of enhancements to wellbeing. This was most obvious during sessions where participants presented positive emotions (laughter, smiling) and directly expressed their enjoyment. However, participants also reported longer lasting benefits to wellbeing, with improvements to emotional regulation and social relationships outside of the sessions. Participants at KCAH discussed how the storytelling sessions, despite their short length, had a positive impact on their lives: getting them talking through the week about things they wouldn't otherwise address; transforming responses to negative emotions; and encouraging them to engage creatively with their environment, 'making poetry out of everything they see'. All of which contributed to improvements in wellbeing.

Developing interpersonal and community relationships

We have also observed positive interactions between participants, leading to greater group cohesion and evidence of community building within organisations. During sessions, participants encouraged each other and provided support and positive reinforcement. They also discussed how they have learned from other participants (peer learning). Empathy work was also observed, with participants reflecting on shared identity markers and expressing how they had learned more about each other. Participants also reported engaging with fellow organisation members to a greater degree outside of sessions. This nurturing of relationships is perhaps most impactful in relation to the group from the

Pearl Project, who agreed to continue as a creative writing group after the project sessions were completed.

There is some evidence that interpersonal development extended out to broader social relationships. For example:

- Participants commented on social concerns, such as animal welfare and community integration.
- During creative tasks, they suggested how they would help friends and relations.
- They wrote from the perspectives of others, including other marginalised groups whose experienced both mirrored and deviated from their own.

Supporting agency and giving participants a voice

A key aspect of how the sessions have contributed to wellbeing is through giving participants a sense of agency and a 'voice'. This is perhaps best illustrated through reference to the participants at the Joel centre. They described themselves as 'hidden' but with a 'story to tell' and 'a valuable voice' that was often ignored. They wanted to show their personal journeys through previous creative work and shared life stories and experiences during the sessions. They signalled how important the sessions were for people in their position (who have experienced homelessness). It was, in their words, 'poignantly wonderful to get our stories across.' Similar, during the Pearl Project sessions, a participant talked about the supportive and nurturing environment that enabled her to find her voice without fear of judgment of failure. The group as whole discussed their growing belief in their own ability to speak about themselves and to speak up.

Connected to this idea of providing a voice was the importance all the groups put on lasting outputs from the sessions, such as the books Richard Neville developed for the groups. The participants expressed that these further validated their voices and potentially enabled them to reach a wider audience. This was heightened by the end of project event where the books were presented to participants and stakeholders by the Mayor and deputy Mayor, adding to the visibility felt by the groups and, again, validating their voices by presenting them in a public setting.

Importance of space

The importance of finding a safe space was revealed in the organisation and delivery of sessions. The location also needed to be conducive to creative endeavours. For example, RAK participants suggested the selected location (Quaker Centre, Kingston) was good for reflection. A peaceful area that allowed them (when doing the activity) to focus on the here and now. The calm, beautiful and well-kept space reinforced a sense of value in themselves. This was held in contrast to being asked to meet in run-down, unkempt spaces which communicated a lack of value placed upon the participants – as well as negatively impacting on the ability to engage in creative activities.

BALANCE sessions took place at Surbiton Library and while attendance was low, the participants positively remarked on being in a library space and discussed their personal connections to it. However, all the other programmes ended up being in locations selected by the community organisations and familiar to their members. Unfortunately, this detracted from the project's aim of encouraging community members to visit and use the library and so contribute to its transformation into a community and creative hub.

Access to culture

The sessions were successful in improving access to culture and introduced elements of literature and literary theory through storytelling activities. This was done sensitively by the facilitator in a manner that was engaging and easily understood by participants. It contributed to participants' skills development in terms of creative and cultural awareness. For example, one participant stated that they now realised there were 'so many ways of being creative' (KCAH). This was also remarked on by the Pearl Project participants who were very interested in the many references provided by the storyteller.

Other methods to encourage consideration of art and culture included the selection of prompts, such as poetry (KCAH) and famous artworks (HESTIA), as well as the introduction of different literary genres (RAK, Pearl) each week. This was revelatory for some participants, both in terms of encountering art but also in being encouraged to use it as a prompt for their own creative process.

Continued creative activity

Self-motivated activities were encouraged, and many participants discussed the creative work they did between sessions. The sessions were described as an impetus to start writing, providing an impulse and an 'opening' for further creative activities. For some participants, storytelling became an emotional outlet that they would draw on outside of sessions.

A nice example of additional creative activity was the presentation of a poem, written outside of the sessions, to the storyteller by the Pearl Project participants to say thank you.

Inter- and Intra-group variation

There appeared to be a divergence among the participants in terms of what they wanted to achieve out of the sessions. For example, MENCAP participants and staff, arguably appeared to view the sessions more as an engagement activity and entertainment. This is not to discount the value it brought in terms of wellbeing. In contrast, participants for KCAH and Pearl Project were actively focussed on creative writing and doing identity and relational work through storytelling.

Variation was also seen within groups. For example, in Hestia, two people were very focused on using the sessions as a developmental tool, to acquire new skills and grow in confidence; whereas another core member wanted to use it as a coping mechanism and had no real interest in developing a new skillset.

Difficulties arose when perceived differences made groups incompatible. This was potentially the case for RAK where variation in English language ability may have contributed to non-attendance: one participant struggled with an activity and became withdrawn when asked to contribute after someone else, with advanced language skills, had shared their work. Unfortunately, this participant did not attend any future sessions - although this may have been for a reason unrelated to the session.

Processing experiences through storytelling

Many participants used the activities (including discussions) to offer up stories about their own lives, as a way of to reflect on and process experiences. This often had a relational effect, strengthening bonds within the group. Sometimes this sharing was a means to engage with previous trauma (Pearl Project, KCAH), and some participants reported that being able to do so through storytelling had a 'healing' effect on them. Other times, storytelling was a way of reflecting on more positive times, such as childhood, when participants had greater access and freedom in creativity (RAK, Hestia).

Sharing experiences and general interests through storytelling was a key component of the MENCAP and BALANCE sessions.

4.3 Evaluation workshops

After observing the sessions, evaluation workshops were conducted to explore in more depth participants' responses and perspectives towards the storytelling sessions. Due to variation between the partner groups and their participants, the evaluation sessions were adapted to both match the format of the preceding storytelling sessions and to meet the needs and assets of the participants. While each was, to a degree, bespoke, they followed these general formats:

- Interactive storytelling + plus drawing activity and feedback (MENCAP; BALANCE)
- Additional informal discussion with participant(s) (HESTIA) over multiple sessions (KCAH)
- Post-session storytelling discussion (Pearl Project; RAK)

Initially, evaluation was meant to include a creative life-writing task. However, based on participant numbers and feedback, an informal discussion was largely deemed the most appropriate and preferred method.

Unfortunately, no evaluation workshop was possible for MIND as the storytelling sessions were part of a drop-in event and so there was not a consistent participant base to contact. In future, evaluation of groups should be scheduled as part of the core storytelling programme and/or follow immediately after an existing session. This informed the process for subsequent evaluation workshops.

All evaluations involved a discussion that was supported by facilitator prompts (see Appendix 8) but flexible and open to participant focus and interest.

4.3.1 Key themes

Positive evaluation

"*The workshops transformed my life. As a person on the spectrum, I was finding it very difficult to know where to start from. The workshops gave me the tools and confidence to make creative writing part of my daily life." Pearl project participant*" (Pearl Project)

Participant perspectives on the sessions were overwhelmingly positive, mirroring many of the key areas identified in the observations. With the acknowledgement that those taking part in the evaluations were the most engaged participants, there was agreement that it was important and valuable to attend sessions and that you 'wouldn't want to miss any' (Hestia). As one participant from KCAH put it: the sessions are 'incredibly avoidable', but you want to come along because they are 'incredibly useful'.

Given their coverage above, we will deal briefly with the areas of personal wellbeing, social and community benefit and skills development. However, it is useful to hear the participant perspectives and see how change mechanisms within the sessions connected into longer term outcomes, particularly when revisiting and discussing prior activities and work.

- Personal wellbeing

Alongside discussion of positive affect, many participants demonstrated improved confidence in their work. This was heightened when they saw their work in printed form, with personal pride leading to a desire to share work with family, friends, and the wider community. Beyond positive responses to seeing work, there were also suggestions that taking part had emotional and health

benefits for participants. The sessions gave 'positive vibes' that 'make you feel better about yourself, gives you a better insight into life, [and] gives you structure' (Hestia). This structure was seen as a way of coping with mental health issues, explored in more detail below.

- Social and community benefits

As in the observations, the evaluations demonstrated how taking part in shared activities fostered positive relationships between participants, with recognition and admiration of others' work. This was furthered through consideration of how participants helped and encouraged each other during activities and commentary on how they liked supporting each other's writing. At its strongest, this exhibited in discussion or examples of collaborative work: creating something together was described as 'a very positive, challenging experience that I won't forget' (Hestia).

At MENCAP, three pairs of participants were observed all engaged in unprompted creative activities during the evaluation. In each case, a more verbal participant guided another member of the group who found verbal communication difficult. While the desire and ability to facilitate storytelling is an important outcome, this example also demonstrates how the creative activities, through collaboration and supportive interaction, contributed to social benefits within the group.

Beyond the immediate circle of participants, there was also awareness of the wider social and community benefits of these activities. The project was viewed as worthwhile because it operated as a form of outreach, something held as increasingly important given current societal problems.

- Skill development

Skills development was observed in the MENCAP evaluation session through creative output. In more discussion-based evaluations it was a topic that was frequently remarked upon by the participants. While the sessions were often viewed as new, unfamiliar, and potentially challenging, many participants saw 'clear progress' in their work – and this became a motivator for attending and desiring further sessions to develop and extend skills.

Many activities were positively evaluated because they were connected to skills development. For members of the RAK group, who were there specifically to improve their language, they rated the session very highly, particularly against other similar activities. They said that 'this lesson is better because I can improve my English' and liked the focus on writing skills, which are not often tackled. In addition, they were keen to stress that activities were 'creative, funny [and] enjoyable', something echoed across the other groups. Importantly, while these were sites for skills development, this didn't impinge on the enjoyment or add to any intimidation in taking part, rather participants 'felt like they were improving without being scored' (Hestia). There was some discussion on the lasting impact of these skills developments, with recognition that they were fun alongside awareness that things were being retained, 'assimilated and accommodated' (Hestia). There was confidence that the immediate benefits would lead to longer term improvements (RAK).

- Creative development

Where the sessions were really seen as beneficial were in their facilitation of creative development. As discussed in the observations, they provided an access to culture, but this also proved to be a (re)introduction to creative work for many. This new experience for participants helped reveal the importance of creativity to them, providing a new way of learning and working through creativity (RAK). Creativity often transitioned to their broader experiences, allowing them to make 'personal and social connections through creative prompts' (HESTIA) or they used creativity to 'help connect together themes' (BALANCE).

This creative development occasionally expanded beyond the borders of the class, with some participants exploring further activities motivated by what they had done in the sessions (HESTIA, KCAH, RAK) and even going on to form creative writing groups (Pearl Project).

- Organisational benefits

'*Things that don't have monetary value are often the most important. It isn't just financial value that is being given, there is so much more being offered here*' (HESTIA)

There were some organisational benefits explicitly encountered during the evaluation workshops. Storytelling activities and outputs were seen as contributing to organisational aims and communities. For example, participants at KCAH were keen to contribute their creative outputs to a book which became a form of memorial for their closing residential centre, which could also be used as evidence of what the centre achieved. It also became a community builder: a means to praise other participants work, as well as to develop connections between staff and participants. Particularly powerful for the participants was reading work submitted by staff members and realising the level of empathy the staff had for their situation.

Future Activities

All participants expressed a desire for further future storytelling activities. When asked about potential improvements in future sessions, a member of balance replied, 'just more'. This extended beyond the original participants, with new attendees (MENCAP) wanting to take part and existing participants discussing how they were encouraging other members to get involved (Hestia, RAK), for example by sharing activities.

Interestingly, there were occasional caveats to future activities, perhaps expected given the unique situations of some of the participants. At KCAH, the participant said they would 'love' to do more, but only with known people. This shows the need for maintaining relationships and the level of trust built with the current facilitator. Others were somewhat resigned that they were at the whim of their organisation, being 'just a service user' (HESTIA) – this opinion was potentially exacerbated by staff turnover within their organisation resulting in minimal ongoing support during the storytelling sessions as discussed below.

Skill of facilitator

It is important to note the recognition given to the skills and personality of Richard Neville, the professional storyteller. He was seen as a good facilitator, providing creative lessons that were fun and enjoyable and that afforded positive outcomes and impacts for participants.

Establishing and building relationships was deemed important and Richard's ability to bring together different participants, successfully managing competing motivations and expectations, was praised. This was further demonstrated in his ability to tailor activities and materials for different participants. He brought a mixture of empathy, enthusiasm, and expertise, that provided a safe environment for creative work and personal expression. The participants 'trusted Richard and each other. When you have that empathetic environment, you come out of your shell.' (HESTIA).

The value of storytelling

'Storytelling is a little cove, where the waves don't buffet you.' (Hestia)

- Processing experiences

Across all groups, in a variety of ways, participants engaged in or described how storytelling helped them reflect and process life events and experiences.

For example, during the storytelling performance of the MENCAP workshop, a participant became concerned and anxious around a wolf puppet that was being used. Later in the session, she started drawing and discussing wolves through her own cultural lens of Harry Potter, to deal with the prior experience and, I would argue, make it less scary.

Storytelling was viewed as powerful tool for dealing with negative events and trauma (HESTIA, KCAH, Pearl Project), even a necessity at times, as a form of catharsis (HESTIA, Pearl Project). One participant at KCAH described using poetry to frame experiences and process and explain loss. He valued the ability to disappear into artistic endeavours and as a means of expression, otherwise he would 'hold things in'. The storytelling sessions allows him to acknowledge issues and focus on assets e.g., being 'kind and caring'.

It also allowed access to happier experiences, often providing a route back to earlier creative experiences or times of creative and social freedom, such as childhood (RAK). The sessions and storytelling activities were seen as an opportunity to share life experiences and stories, sometimes with a high degree of personal disclosure, to process a range of emotions.

- A social resource

'[It was] heartfelt, moving, because it was true. Storytelling isn't therapy, but it is cathartic. Everyone has a story to tell, or they feel they do. It is a way of communicating. It's a deep thing… sharing stories as a way of communicating.' (Hestia)

Storytelling was a social resource in that it encouraged shared reactions and communal responses to elements of the narrative offered by participants (MENCAP, BALANCE). However, on a more reflective level, it can be considered a social resource in the way it was used to explore the wider social world by participants. There was a recognition that as storytelling involved personal disclosure, it provided an avenue for connecting to other (vulnerable) people through shared experiences and empathy.

Giving a voice to the marginalised

This was a key preoccupation of the residents of the JOEL centre (KCAH), as they perceived their status as addicts and rough sleepers meant that they were ignored in society. This belief was echoed in other groups, that given societal attributions (around mental health and disability) they were not being heard. In tandem with the personal, social and skills benefits discussed above, these sessions were an opportunity for participants to increase their confidence and develop their voices. The sessions offered a degree of validation to their voices and stories, enhanced by the development of the books which provided potential access to a wider audience. (This was also a big trust builder for the residents at the JOEL centre, as 'they are often promised things that subsequently don't happen' and so were extremely happy to receive their copies of the book.)

Importance of space/environment

Connected to the previous discussion is the importance of a safe space that is conducive to creative activity. This is both conceived of literally and metaphorically. So, the physical space needed to be somewhere familiar and safe, as well as free from distraction. However, the sessions were also viewed as a safe environment because participants knew that anything they shared would stay in

the room and that they could be involved at a level that they felt comfortable with: 'You can be as in it or as distant as you want' (HESTIA).

Additional areas for consideration

- Intra-group variation

It was observed by participants that variations in participant experience and needs was impacting on uptake and subsequent retention. For example, in the MENCAP evaluation, one participant said they didn't enjoy drawing. Unfortunately, this was often a key component of the storytelling activities conducted with this group and may have made them feel marginalised during sessions. Similarly, different levels of expertise and ability impacted on attendance. For one participant at KCAH, they revealed that concerns over their literacy made them initially reticent to take part. Fortunately, these were mitigated, to a degree, after support from the other participants (and greater awareness of what was involved). A similar experience was reported in RAK, where the core participants recognised that other members of the organisation (who either never came or stopped attending) may have been intimidated by the format and/or content. It was also remarked that they may not have had a sufficient level of English even if they did want to come. (Further discussion of this issue can be found in section 4.5.6.)

4.4 Staff Interviews

'*I thought it was a great project. I thought it was fantastic.*' (KCAH1)

Interviews were conducted with at least one member of staff from each organisation (two for KCAH). These ranged from those involved in the initial planning (KCAH, BALANCE, RAK, PEARL PROJECT) and those who took a more direct hand in facilitating sessions (KCAH, MENCAP, MIND, HESTIA). They lasted approximately 30 minutes and included discussion of overall aims and ambitions for the project, to explore what success looked like for each organisation, alongside more focussed discussion on the sessions themselves and particular activities. The interviews were also an opportunity for staff members to evaluate the storytelling programme and suggest improvements or changes they would like to see for future activities. (An example facilitator guide is provided in Appendix 9).

4.4.1 Key themes

Positive effect of sessions

Across all interviews, the staff members were positive about the sessions and the storytelling programmes. This was based on their own observations (for those who attended sessions) and from positive feedback from participants. Of particular interest, pointing to the value of the project, was the belief that not only did these activities positively contribute to organisational offer, in some interviews they were marked as providing something current activities didn't (KCAH, MENCAP). This was most strongly articulated by a member of staff at KCAH: 'I think this creative writing session, just generally, the project has been the most successful thing that we've done at Joel'. While still positive, Pearl Project were perhaps the most qualified in their view, believing the sessions were beneficial without being the whole picture. Arguably, this is because the storytelling sessions were one strand of a larger programme that Voices of Hope were currently running. However, the staff member still believed that '[o]n the whole people have enjoyed it. Got a lot out of it and would love to do it again'.

Engagement

A marker of success for the sessions was the engagement witnessed in those taking part. As one KCAH staff member put it, it was 'one of the most engaged, I've seen them' (KCAH1). They went on to point out how residents talked positively about the sessions, wanted to show staff what they were doing and continued writing between sessions, demonstrating the impact of the project beyond the borders of the sessions. Similarly, at BALANCE, participants displayed 'excitement' and 'anticipation' before sessions, encouraged staff members to take them to the library, and subsequently wanted to discuss what they had done. Such was the level of engagement, that some participants even showed a strong preference for storytelling over other activities on offer. For example, 'one student didn't go to a different event as he wanted to attend the class instead.' (RAK) Across the interviews, there was a reported desire for more storytelling activities from participants.

Wellbeing

Enhancements to participant wellbeing was marked in many of the interviews. Staff at KCAH pointed out that collectively focussing on a particular activity, 'really did lift everybody' (KCAH1). This positive wellbeing effect extended to staff and, in some cases, the local context (location and/or community) as well. For example, one KCAH staff member recalled 'having a very stressful day, long meetings, and all I could hear through all the closed doors was just laughter coming from downstairs. And it was just amazing.' (KCAH2).

Wellbeing was generated both through creativity and through storytelling contributing to a sense of community. This was particularly marked for those organisations working with those with mental health issues, with creativity being described as a 'lifeline' bringing 'a sense of hope' (MIND). For Hestia, many of whose members are long-term mental health sufferers 'repeating the same cycles', the sessions gave them a sense of agency, with participants 'really happy to be creating, rather than receiving something'. Similarly, the interviewee for Pearl Project, highlighted how survivors of trauma could process their experiences through creative writing, improving health and wellbeing and that creativity while 'being in a group context… is really positive' and 'helps people come alive again'.

Confidence

Increases in general confidence were often cited as evidence of positive change. The storytelling offered an opportunity for participants to try something new and build up their confidence (RAK), with most organisations not having provided similar activities previously. It was believed that gains in confidence extended beyond the session themselves, providing something that participants could draw on 'in whatever social situation they find themselves in' (BALANCE). This was most strongly expressed by KCAH, where the sessions were seen as 'a massive breakthrough' for a particular participant who has 'gone on to other stuff'. There was also a suggestion that these benefits had lasted, for example, HESTIA signalled some quieter members who 'got a sort of empowerment' from the sessions.

Skills development

'Having people work together on a singular thing and join their ideas together…[it's] a social skill as well as… this skill to be able to find links and draw parallels between ideas and create something that is bigger than the sum of its parts.' (MENCAP)

Skills development was observed by staff members in a range of areas. As expected, the sessions were seen to stimulate and engage creativity. However, staff also saw creative activities as

contributing to social and communication skills, encouraging collaboration and broader integration into community life. A tangible example of this being the BALANCE participants learning how to access and use the library just by attending the sessions. This also included relational and empathic skills: 'One participant is really set in his views, but this really brought him out of himself… He really enjoyed it, thinking outside of the box.' (RAK).

Across all interviews, there was agreement that the activities and outcomes were suited to meeting organisational aims, for example, at HESTIA they were pleased that participants 'are the ones creating the stories', which matches their aim of having members 'take action…not receiving service'.

Some interviewees praised the storytelling sessions for providing skills development in ways that are missing from current organisational offers. For example, the facilitator from MENCAP described the activities as 'multifaceted' and 'multi-tiered' (MENCAP) encouraging collaboration and critical thinking that was not seen in their other activities. Even those organisations with more specific aims for the groups, praised the sessions. For RAK, the sessions hit the 'sweet spot in terms of activities' combining language learning with their brief for widening participation, contributing to social interaction and communicative confidence.

As with wellbeing, there is evidence of skill development having an impact beyond the sessions. A staff member at RAK described how 'thought provoking' a session had been for a participant, and that they went on to have 'quite a debate' about the content afterwards.

At this point in the evaluation, we do need to add a caveat: while all interviewees praised the sessions, some also stated that they couldn't be certain changes would be ongoing and become lasting impacts.

The Facilitator and approach

'I liked pretty much everything. I thought they were structured really well… Richard was great at setting up the context in a way they would understand, and then actually getting them to do the activity… and bringing it all together at the end, incorporating everyone's ideas into a single thing.' (MENCAP)

As in the observations and evaluation workshops, there was substantial praise both for the facilitator and for his approach to the sessions. Flexibility and adaptability were particularly noted as well as his charisma, knowledge, and interpersonal skills. As the staff members at RAK put it, "Richard is very experienced and adaptable and can offer all sorts of things… a magnetic personality, fascinating and widely knowledgeable. Able to talk to anybody." This had positive effects when engaging with participants' complex needs, 'even those who lacked confidence in reading and writing, once they realised there were other ways around it, other ways to share, they were keen to get involved.' (KCAH1). This was particularly valuable for KCAH, when the sessions had to adapt to the occasionally chaotic environments around those recovering from addiction. Praise was also given for how Richard delivered the sessions, with MIND liking the 'thematic approach' and Pearl Project stating that the multiple activities gave 'inspiring ways to engage and to think'.

There was also praise for the library project team more generally. As expressed by RAK: "Kingston Library are such lovely partners, and they understand the constraints the clients have. Always keen to work with them. Without exception, all the people in the library have been brilliant."

A safe space to be heard

'All of the outside noise, all of the chaos, everything else that was happening in their lives, it was almost like it was just paused.' (KCAH2)

- Locations

There was some discussion in the interviews about the importance of space. Generally, there was a sense that appropriate spaces had been selected to encourage engagement and creative contribution (when the sessions took place in-person). It was deemed important for participants to feel comfortable and have access to necessary facilities which is why library spaces were not always positively evaluated:

Members of RAK had had a previous negative experience in terms of access when attending an event at the library, which lead them to suggest using the Quaker Centre, Kingston, instead.

Hestia were similar in their evaluation of space. They positively evaluated the use of Zoom to facilitate activities as many of their members deal with anxiety. It was noted that by having the sessions remotely, it improved a particularly anxious participants confidence who was now coming more frequently to in-person activities. This being the case, they were open to more in-person activities, while signposting the 'performative' nature of face-to-face sessions that might add an additional psychological load for their members. Therefore, while Kingston library might be an acceptable location (due to its proximity to Hestia), using Hestia's own space was deemed more appropriate as it 'would add to the safety'.

Similarly, MENCAP and PP believed it would be possible to use the library but had a definite preference for using their own space. In contrast, MIND, also a mental health charity, believed that the library would be a good space for future activities because 'it is inclusive and community based…a good environment that is not too pressured and social'.

- Giving participants a voice

While the physical space is important, it became clear from the interviews that many participants viewed the sessions as a metaphorical safe space in which to engage in creativity and develop their voices. Participants 'enjoyed having that space and time just to process really, and to create' (Pearl Project) with sessions becoming an 'opportunity to be heard' (BALANCE) outside of their organisation. Not only were participants gaining the time and confidence to share their stories, but they were expanding their audience.

The perception that the sessions gave participants a voice was frequently marked. For example, Pearl Project discussed how storytelling could 'break [the] stigma of abuse' and 'gave survivors a voice'. This was hugely important for KCAH, where the storytelling sessions allowed participants to 'rediscover who they are outside of their addiction' (KCAH2). This staff member went on to articulate why this is so valuable to those ignored by society:

'…somebody actually having a voice and being able to tell their own story. And I think especially working with people who use substances, people that have been homeless, it does very much feel that in society, their voices are lost and they're not heard. They're the people that you walk past in the street and you don't want to look at them because they might ask you for money. They're the people that are congregating on the street corner drinking and you swerve to go around them. And all of these people are individuals who have lived life. Quite a lot of them have experienced trauma

which has led them to where they're actually at. But actually, as you'll know, when you start speaking to these people, they're funny, they're intelligent, they're engaging.' (KCAH2)

4.5 Moving Forward: recommendations and areas for improvement

'When can we get this again?' (HESTIA)

We now address recommendations and areas for improvement arising from the data analysed, and how this might inform future sessions.

It is important to note that all those interviewed were keen for more activities and reported desire for additional sessions or programmes. Some staff were keen to expand the remit, potentially holding activities in different locations or encouraging interactions and relationships with wider social circles. It was good to see the influence the storytelling sessions had on potentially shaping future organisational offer: for example, RAK staff believing a future focus on adult literacy and storytelling seemed like a good fit. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances may impact on the opportunity for future activity with some of the organisations expressing concern around staffing and capacity levels. For KCAH, the premature closure of the JOEL centre (due to funding issues), means that while participants will want to continue, it is dependent on where they are personally at the time and whether they can access the additional support they need (KCAH2).

When questioned on whether organisations might be willing to facilitate storytelling programmes themselves, based on their experience of the sessions, there was a mixed response. Some stressed the importance of external facilitators adding weight to the experience, and making participants feel their time is valuable (KCAH2) or who have additional skills to provide activities outside of a core mission (RAK), while others were keen for internal staff to run sessions (MENCAP). In between these poles, BALANCE believed the sessions were a collective effort between themselves and the library but were keen to support staff members from appropriate roles to run sessions – and indeed suggested that attending the sessions had provided some inspiration for staff for storytelling activities. MIND suggested the potential of having multiple staff members facilitating sessions to provide an additional level of support.

In terms of adjustments to future programmes and activities, suggestions included expanding the offer to incorporate further social digital skills (BALANCE); improving engagement through variation of activities (for example alternating physical and creative activities (MENCAP)) or connecting it to other arts and culture-based activities, such as Book Groups, or existing organisational offers (MIND); and providing sessions more infrequently, as events rather than a consecutive programme (MENCAP; MIND).

4.5.1 What is storytelling? How to promote and present future sessions

Across a number of participants and staff, there was a reported initial confusion as to what was involved in the sessions and, indeed, what was meant by storytelling. This may have put off participants who wanted a clearer indication of what taking part would entail. For those who did attend, they often wanted more detail of the types of activities involved. One resident of JOEL believed he would have been able to 'put more into' the first activity if he had a better understanding of what was involved. However, the participants did report that they soon felt comfortable once they started taking part and knew what to expect (KCAH, HESTIA, RAK).

A participant from HESTIA, citing his academic background, believed that storytelling was slightly negatively viewed, and that creative writing was more recognised and appealing (potentially due to associations with written as opposed to oral modes). This was suggested as a potential reason for

low attendance with more people attending prior creative writing (HESTIA) or language (RAK) activities.

This signals an important lesson for future storytelling activities. They need to be carefully promoted taking into account awareness of storytelling and perceptions of status. Equally, it would be beneficial to provide further detail of what is involved. It is acknowledged that this is somewhat problematic given the collaborative nature of design of the sessions. However, a number of participants did believe that more people being involved would be beneficial (suggesting 5 or 6 per session), so a balance needs to be sought.

4.5.2 The Library: Involvement, Status and Space

Given the aims of the project, the role and status of the library was brought up in discussion with participants. Generally, this was positively looked upon, with the library having a positive reputation and being a motivator for taking part in activities such as this project – if a project is run by 'Kingston Library…[it] must make it kosha.' (Hestia). RAK even suggested that part of their mission was to get people to join the library and they include this as an output on funding reports.

However, many of the participants were unsure of KL's actual involvement with the project, with only one storytelling programme (BALANCE) taking place on library premises. There were questions raised about KL staff involvement and whether they were observers or participants. The library wasn't always clearly promoted, with the staff member from Hestia saying they didn't think participants always associated the sessions with the library.

The BALANCE sessions and evaluation did seem to be enhanced by taking place in Surbiton Library. Their participants liked being in the library and the space facilitated recollection of previous positive experiences. As discussed in section 4.4, other organisations had had previous negative experiences around access to the library and believed this would put people off. This is something that the library will need to address moving forward if they want to invite engagement with diverse community members and further their ambitions towards being viewed as a cultural and creative hub. Their communication of this ambition could also be improved as the staff member from the Pearl Project said they didn't know of the libraries ambition to be a creative hub, or even engage in creative activities, despite an existing relationship with the library. They did suggest this mission would align well for future project work.

Moving forward, most of the participants were happy with similar events taking place within the library, with suggestions for additional related events connected to storytelling (such as creative writing, film nights and book groups) – although there was a hope that existing activities could be more inclusive, diverse, and accessible with the current book clubs deemed a little homogenous.

4.5.3 Zoom vs. Face-to-face sessions

It was a necessity to carry out some of the programmes online, either exclusively (HESTIA, MIND) or transitioning from online to face-to-face (MENCAP, KCAH) due to Covid. This raised a number of challenges and there was generally a preference for face-to-face sessions among staff and participants.

In discussion with carers at the MENCAP evaluation, they were particularly critical of the ZOOM sessions where participants were in one location, and the facilitator and evaluator in their own offices. There were technical issues (small screen, bad speakers) which led to a lack of engagement and issues with concentration. These concerns must be acknowledged but perhaps softened by the observation of a participant who was fully engaged and excited during the zoom sessions but was noticeable more withdrawn during face-to-face sessions.

While there was a suggestion that using the screens could contribute to productivity, mostly they gave the participants an excuse to withdraw (KCAH; MENCAP) with the MENCAP staff member arguing that the face-to-face sessions were 'leaps and bounds' above the zoom sessions; partly due to activity fatigue and the limited potential for engaging a room of participants via a small screen.

For the JOEL residents, the use of Zoom had the advantage of being another new activity and contributed to skills development and technical literacy. It did allow for more focus on the activities but was less conducive to discussion and the creative play seen in later sessions and during the evaluation.

Where remote delivery was more positively viewed was by mental health charities (MIND; HESTIA) particularly as the sessions were taking place when meeting in-person was restricted. Doing sessions online was seen as enhancing reach and access, allowing organisations to engage with more members as the sessions are 'reachable anywhere' (MIND). For both organisations this support for Zoom was qualified. HESTIA recognised that the option to do the activities from home worked well and that some of their participants liked Zoom, but one of their participants signalled that that there had been technical issues during the sessions and that Zoom might be exclusionary for those not comfortable with technology. Similarly, MIND also suggested that the online format may have contributed to lower and sporadic attendance.

Ultimately, there will always be differences in preference in delivery between those who find it difficult to travel and those who really appreciate face-to-face activities. However, if a mediated approach is adopted, it would seem that there is further work to do to avoid technical issues and enhance and refine remote delivery.

4.5.4 How structured should the sessions be?

Many participants were happy with the format and the delivery of the sessions. However, a minority did comment that they would like something more structured, and potentially with additional preparatory/homework. They suggested that having preparation time, to think and engage with the storytelling process, rather than spontaneous creativity, would have enhanced what they got out of the sessions.

In the interviews, a number of points were raised about the structuring of the sessions. For example, HESTIA participants were reported as wanting a more structured programme, with overarching stories that lasted more than one session, while MENCAP suggested a clearer structure with greater variation in activity would have increased attention and reduced fatigue.

There was also an argument that a more structured approach would have helped with promotion. If activities could be fixed from the outset, then a clearer description of storytelling generally and the sessions specifically could potentially be provided. KCAH suggested there may have been an 'initial fear' as residents would not have done anything like this and so required more support at the outset. They suggested a 'promo' video introducing the course and facilitator may have helped here. Indeed, clearer promotion was mentioned in a number of interviews to better manage expectation. MIND wanted more promotion including more detail as to what the sessions would entail, like KCAH, pointing to potential anxiety for new attendees as 'storytelling is such a broad topics'.

I include this discussion here as the storyteller used a participant-led approach, and so this desire for a clearer outline of structured activities, is not straightforward – and potentially detrimental to asset-based and collaborative storytelling sessions. A balance could be found, as RAK suggested: 'a bit more spiel…or some sort of thing' would be helpful to support the 'very fluid and evolving offer.'

They proposed having introductory sessions with a larger group during an established activity would help familiarise both facilitator and participants with each other.

While structure was sometimes marked as desirable, there was still a large amount of positivity around how Richard ran the sessions. The project was praised as being 'malleable for different groups' (MENCAP) and Richard singled out as adaptable and shaping the sessions based on participant needs. Ultimately, this may be a case of managing expectations and understanding participant needs, some of whom prefer structure. As it was put in the RAK interview, it was 'the unconventionality of it that we found charming, and [what participants] really enjoyed may have unsettled some students who have a very set idea in their head about what an English lesson looks like or what a session looks like.'

4.5.4 Working effectively with community organisations

Having an engaged and active member of staff from partner organisations is helpful in ensuring the sessions run smoothly, participants feel supported, and the project is promoted. For example, it came to light that sessions were missed by BALANCE participants because a staff member wasn't fully aware of the sessions and didn't know where to take participants.

Staff engagement can be difficult when working in the relatively unstable context of community-based projects, given changes in funding and staff turnover. For example, after an original HESTIA staff member left (who had been responsible for organising the programme), a participant was left frustrated that there was limited support and in-session engagement from the stand-in staff member, whom had their camera off and microphone muted during the sessions.

4.5.5 Safe spaces and safeguarding

During the interviews, the Pearl Project raised a few issues in relation to the provision of a safe space. Their sessions were intended as a women-only group. However, on one occasion a participant brought a male partner, and the facilitator was not aware if they should be allowed to stay or not.

Pearl Project also received a complaint that a participant felt triggered by some of the writing stimuli, specifically the use of cards with images they felt were a bit 'occult-like' and which they equated with control. The staff member acknowledged this was a subjective response that didn't require 'emergency feedback' and some participants really liked the activity. However, they did also question whether the facilitator might have required additional support when dealing with a participant who responded negatively to an activity due to their complex needs and background.

They believed all these issues could have been mitigated if there had been clearer communication between themselves and the facilitator at the outset. They would have ensured an additional staff member was present. It should be noted, as the programmes were initially planned, a partner staff member was envisaged as being part of the group or, at the least, on hand to provide support. Regardless, this does raise a concern around safeguarding and making sure additional support is available and provided by partner organisations who are best placed to care for their members.

4.5.6 Attendance

While strong levels of engagement where observed, some consideration needs to be given to general participation levels.

Attendance varied greatly within the groups from 2 core members at KCAH to an attendance of up to 20 at MENCAP. For some groups there was a drop in attendance as the sessions progressed, but generally attendance was stable, at least for the 6 initially scheduled sessions.

Both RAK and MIND expressed disappointment that numbers were lower than expected. For MIND, they were uncertain why this was the case, but suggested the format may have played a part – being akin to a weekly drop-in session, as well as being carried out online.

Maximising attendance was a concern for a number of the organisations (RAK, HESTIA, MIND), with the programmes 'a success but [we] would have hoped that more people came' (MIND). However, lower attendance also needs to be understood in terms of intra-variation of organisational membership. So, while attendance was low for RAK, this was arguably a result of the storytelling sessions being more suitable for fluent students. While RAK would have liked attendance to be higher, the storytelling sessions actually filled a gap in their organisational offer because they normally have to dedicate more resources to those with lower English-language proficiency.

For some organisations, whose members have varying complex needs, it was considered inevitable that the sessions worked better for some participants (MENCAP). As their group facilitator argued: 'Non-verbal members – may feel a little left out. They won't be able to communicate in these complex ideas in any real way. They'll still enjoy the show but how much else they get out of it is hard to tell.' While enjoyment and engagement are still valuable outcomes, additional streaming of participants may be necessary to properly address intra-group variation, for example, catering for those with more severe learning disabilities.

Numbers are only one metric through which to judge impact and the low numbers were not unexpected, as all groups were from 'hard to reach' demographics. Also, even groups with low numbers had very committed participants who reflected very positively on the quality and impact of their experiences. Often, when the groups had lower numbers, the storyteller was able to provide bespoke activities and participants with diverse needs often benefitted from more personal encounters with storytelling. For example, in KCAH one resident was particularly nervous about taking part, due to her literacy skills, and only through encouragement from the two core participants did she feel comfortable moving from an observer to a participant.

5. Evaluation of Impact

This section will now re-engage with the evaluation indicators in light of the findings from the observations, workshops and interviews discussed above.

1. **Create a template for future storytelling activities and develop tools, materials and resources to provide sustained and sustainable support for non-facilitated storytelling.**

A large range of different storytelling methods, tools and activities have been observed across the sessions with the evaluator impressed by the variety employed. The storyteller utilised a range of different example activities and creative strategies, to provide a model of best practice for storytelling sessions. These can be marked as a success in terms of meeting the following change mechanisms, with participants seen or reporting to:

- Gain insights into storytelling/writing/creativity
- Engage in personal and collective creative work
- Gain inspiration for creative projects
- Gain confidence and believe they have something to contribute

These mechanisms were enhanced through the production of physical outputs that encouraged further positive affect and demonstrated the value of storytelling to partner organisations.

These change mechanisms supported longer term outcomes among participants, reported in both the evaluation workshops and interviews, including:

- Increased confidence in articulating thoughts and ideas and further understanding of the value of their experiences and storytelling.
- Sense of achievement through creative output and skills development; contributing to further activity and mutual support.
- Enhanced future eagerness to contribute

Perhaps most pertinently, from the interviews we have seen both an increased understanding of storytelling and its value in partner organisations, but also a development in understanding how to potentially facilitate storytelling.

Drawing on the observations of sessions and utilising the feedback from participants and partners, a toolkit has been developed, in tandem with an online digital repository of resources, to support partner and libraries staff in future storytelling activities. This was enhanced through the interviews and impact workshops to help select activities and design and refine the delivery method for the toolkit to ensure maximum reach. For example, it was often repeated by staff members that they lacked the skills and experience of the professional storyteller, so additional instructional and example videos were created to accompany the toolkit. It is acknowledged that further work may be necessary to embed storytelling skills and practice, which will be influenced by external factors such as staffing levels and capacity, but the project has demonstrated the value of the storytelling to community organisations and provided the means for partners to develop and engage their own activities without the need for a professional storyteller.

The issues around Covid and remote delivery have encouraged the exploration and creation of digital materials and resources with varying success. However, as above, they provide a useful test for how these sessions might be delivered by less experienced facilitators in future. These have also increased awareness of the importance of multimodal and mixed activities (performance, dance) which feeds into the toolkit.

2. **Build and maintain relationships between Kingston Libraries, Community Groups and their members; creating a network for storytelling, shared activities and future projects.**

In relation to impact marker 2, the project has been a qualified success. It has seen a definite development of intra-group connections and expanded relationships between Kingston Libraries and partner organisations.

At the level of participants, there was evidence within the sessions that relationships were forming and developing through storytelling, meeting the following change mechanisms:

- Reflect on their own and others' work
- Believe they can add value to the session, and their communities.

And outcomes:

- Increased confidence in articulating thoughts and ideas and further understanding of the value of their experiences and storytelling.
- Increased feelings of belonging to a group of like-minded people
- Sense of achievement through creative output and skills development; contributing to further activity and mutual support.
- Enhanced future eagerness to contribute.

We observed positive interactions between participants, development of group cohesion and evidence of community building within the organisation. Within sessions, participants have encouraged others, providing support and positive reinforcement, discussed how they have learned about other participants and suggested shared identity markers. They have also reported engaging with fellow organisation members to a greater degree outside of sessions. Participants also discussed doing their own creative work outside of sessions and encouraging others to join storytelling activities. Participation and creativity have led to increased confidence in social interactions and wider community engagement.

At a fundamental level, there has been progress in this area by dint of the reinforcement of existing relationships and the formation of new relationships with community organisations across the borough. The project did lead to the outcome of: greater links to the library and access to community resources.

Similarly, the successful delivery of the storytelling sessions has demonstrated to partner organisations how these collaborations might operate in the future. The clearest evidence for success can be seen in the interviews, with all partner organisations interested in future storytelling activities and keen to be involved in future projects with the Library.

The library has benefited greatly from the project. It has enhanced its profile, including outreach to non-users, and increased awareness of its offer to the community, particularly in terms of creative activities. It is difficult to evaluate if the library is a first-choice partner amongst the community organisations, but certainly they all expressed a desire to work with the library again, positively evaluating both its staff and status.

Where the project could have been more active was in promoting connections and collaboration between partner organisations. At the interview stage, staff members were not aware that this was occurring (or an aim of the project). It was only at latter events (project celebration; impact

workshops) that attention was given to nurturing these connections. Ideally, it might have been something fostered earlier on in the project. As a result, the network for storytelling remains informal and potentially fragile. There is scope, particularly to meet Kingston Libraries' longer term aims, to develop more of shared contact point or communication hub to afford greater collaboration both through the library but also between partner organisations.

3. **Library and Partner staff/volunteers become advocates for storytelling, understanding how it can contribute to the delivery of services.**

While active engagement by partner staff during sessions varied a lot between organisations, the key outcome contributing to this impact was met. All staff demonstrated:

- Greater insights into participant needs and experiences through participation in storytelling sessions.

This was a mark of success for the project as partner staff members, through their own observations or through talking with participants, saw the value of storytelling and how it could benefit their participants. This extended to organisational benefits, as discussed in section 4, where storytelling activities could contribute value in ways current offerings did not and how storytelling might shape future activities. The fact that all organisations wanted to engage in future storytelling activities with the library underscores the changing understanding of the value of storytelling, particularly where it was seen to interact with and support organisational aims.

This was reinforced through the development and delivery of the toolkit, including during the toolkit workshop where staff members explored how storytelling might be used in their organisations and considered who within the organisation might go on to deliver or draw on storytelling activities in their work.

It is clear that a key impediment to this becoming a lasting impact is the external factor of staffing capacity and turnover. Even within the project itself, when key members of staff left partner organisations, it was often difficult to sustain engagement with replacement staff. So, while current staff members are engaged and enthusiastic, this is an area that may need revisiting as the library continues to develop into a community and creative hub.

4. **Contribute to the transformation of the library into a community hub, by providing space (creative and physical) for storytelling activities and projects, strengthening connections between the library, community groups and their individual members.**

The project has undoubtable strengthened existing bonds between the library and community groups and generated further connections, particularly with individual members. It was particularly successful in providing creative space for participants, many of whom had lost the opportunity or desire to engage in creative and artistic endeavours – the benefits of re-discovering creativity have been detailed at length in section 3. A good example of this is from Pearl Project, where the staff member discussed how 'trauma and PTSD shuts down creativity'. For this group, the initial programme provided the impetus to engage with creativity, subsequent sessions where then held at the library and participants have now set up their own writing group. While we cannot make a prediction on the longevity of the group, this is direct and positive evidence of the library providing the support for future storytelling activities.

The project should be viewed as a first step on a longer journey to achieve the transformational aim of becoming a community and creative hub. While the status and input of the library was valued, by having minimal sessions within library spaces (for several valid reasons, including covid and the desire by organisations to use more familiar spaces), the project was unable to fully capitalise on increased awareness and relationship with the library during the current project. However, many of the groups suggested that a transition to the library space would be a possibility moving forward and given the enthusiasm for engaging in future creative projects with the library, it is re-positioning and re-presenting itself as a creative influence within the community.

I would suggest that to sustain this transformation, it needs to be supported by investment in staff and potentially infrastructure to ensure accessibility and availability and to enable the exploration of additional avenues for supporting creativity. For example, a potential direction suggested by the project team, was the development of a dedicated (creative)maker space with resources to facilitate storytelling activities supported by the toolkit which would be made available to library and community organisation staff and members. These ambitions must be tempered by concerns expressed towards the end of the project around staffing capacity, given budgetary constraints and hiring freezes.

5. **Participants feel empowered to share their stories and storytelling becomes a positive resource in their lives. Sessions and future activities contribute to improved personal wellbeing, social skills, and creative expression for participants.**

This impact marker provides the most immediate and obvious benefit of the project. As discussed, observation of the sessions revealed evidence of enhancements to wellbeing. The sessions, and storytelling more generally, became an emotional outlet for some participants tied to their capacity for creativity.

This occurred during sessions, for example, participants presented positive emotions and directly expressed their enjoyment. Participants, and staff, also reported longer lasting benefits, with improvements to their emotional regulation, relationships, integration into the community and a (re)discovery of creativity. For example, participants at KCAH reported how the storytelling sessions, despite their short length, had an impact on their lives: getting them talking through the week about things they wouldn't otherwise; encouraging them to be creative; transforming responses to negative emotions; and giving them a voice. They also commented how they enjoyed these sessions over other activities they took part in. Similarly, a core group of 3 Hestia participants, talked about developing new skills through the sessions, and gaining confidence to speak out and speak up.

Improvements to wellbeing, social skills and creative expression contribute to an important outcome for the participants; the project, through the sessions and activities, gave agency and voice to participants, who often felt ignored in the wider community. For the MENCAP participants, seeing themselves represented in art enhanced their visibility. While, for KCAH participants it was 'poignantly wonderful to get our stories across', and they signalled the value of the sessions and creative outputs in achieving this and giving them a voice.

Skills development and encouragement of self-motivated creative activities was also provided, with participants reporting how the sessions were an impetus to start writing and they continued to explore creative activities between sessions.

At a more practical level, skills development in relation to the project included interpersonal skills, critical thinking, communication skills, language development, as well as access to arts and culture. These have become a positive resource in participants' lives beyond the limits of the project.

5.2 Areas for consideration for future projects

While the project was undoubtably a success, there are some points for the project team to consider when planning and delivering future projects.

a. It is worth considering how best to attract and support participants who have little experience of storytelling (or indeed understanding of what it is). At an early session (KCAH week 1), a participant felt unable to complete an exercise. He described the activity as 'intense' and he felt 'pressured', emerging from an unfamiliarity with expectations around storytelling sessions and writing activities. The storyteller was able to focus on the positive elements of the work produced and adjust delivery in subsequent sessions. Suggestions from staff members and participants was to have further introductory materials and a clearer description of what was involved (including defining/describing storytelling).
b. While a participant-led approach has been successful, there were some requests for a more structured approach. This may be partly mitigated by addressing the above comment. However, it does feed into a wider consideration around intragroup variation. While this was marked as being handled well by the facilitator in some groups (e.g., HESTIA) for others the activities could be considered exclusionary (MENCAP). While the MENCAP staff member suggested that this is perhaps inevitable given the pre-existing make-up of the group, it does point to the potential benefit of additional streaming based on participants needs.
c. While the project has been successful in engaging organisations in experiences of collaboration internally and within the library, more work could have been done to encourage collaboration and connection across groups. This was evident in some of the activities towards the end of the project, and so the project should perhaps be framed as the starting point for future collaborations. However, the scope to introduce these connections earlier in the process could have been explored.
d. It is worth considering what is the optimal number of participants for a session, both in terms of engagement and delivery but also resources. This will vary between organisations with groups observed ranging from approx. 15 participants to sessions where only 1 participant is present. Lower participation is not inherently negative, and smaller group numbers can mean enhanced support for individuals. Indeed, the value of the sessions to small groups and individuals cannot be underestimated. (When attendance levels were low it was often a result of the needs of the participants.) However, higher attendance was occasionally marked as a potential improvement by both staff and participants and so this is something that needs attention.
e. Occasionally there could have been better lines of communication maintained with partner staff members to ensure sessions went ahead as planned; they were occasionally postponed or cancelled at short notice. Similarly, connections with partner organisations could be more robust. Issues have arisen where the key contacts have moved on from the organisation, impacting on project activities. This will need further consideration if a sustained network is desired between partner organisations and Kingston Libraries for future collaboration.
f. Due to Covid, there were sometimes complications around delivery, for example, lengthy preparation of materials in session. This worked well when an experienced member of staff

facilitated an additional activity. However, on another occasion, it led to the early ending of a session by a different staff member seeking to re-engage participants by changing activities. The trialling of new materials and approaches is useful for the project but can have a negative impact on the session delivery – and might negatively influence future decisions around collaboration. (Important to note, this only happened on one session, and contributed to a discussion of how to incorporate other activities into the storytelling process and outputs.)

g. If the library wants to fully commit to re-positioning itself as a community creative hub, then more activities need to be conducted in library spaces. The project has started doing the work of encouraging participants to visit the library and increasing awareness among partner staff of the viability of using library spaces – but this is something that requires further attention to sustain this positive trend. Unfortunately, external forces, such as budgets and staffing capacity, may negatively impact on this.

6. Conclusion

It can be clear from this report that the project was successful and resulted in a range of benefits for the participants, community organisations and Kingston Libraries. It met it's aims of supporting and empowering individuals, many of whom where marginalised and/or had lost access to creativity. The immediate gains from the sessions, such as improvements in wellbeing alongside a range of skills development, were sustained through the production of creative outputs and events, with evidence of continued cultural engagement and storytelling. The storytelling projects were also effective in contributing to the organisational aims of diverse partner organisations, providing a model for participant-led and collaborative storytelling approaches.

Key findings from the analysis of observations, workshops and interviews include the value of storytelling in terms of wellbeing, the potential for storytelling to support a range of skills development and the importance of a safe physical and emotional space that both facilitates creative activities but also emerges through storytelling. These combine into a powerful impact for the project. By providing **access** to resources and addressing participant **needs**, the project supports participants' **voices**. So, participants from marginalised groups are provided a safe environment to (re)discover creativity and given agency over their own stories. This space and attention validated the sharing of their experiences, giving them a voice and confidence that it is of value to a wider community audience.

While a lot of this success draws on the skills and abilities of the professional storyteller, and he was praised by all parties, the project has laid the foundations for future storytelling activities organised and run independently of an experienced storyteller. This has been achieved through: the provision of a storytelling toolkit; by increasing awareness of the value of storytelling; inspiring confidence in participant's storytelling abilities; and forging relationships for future projects and activities. As commented on in the recommendations above, this is the first step in the libraries longer-term transformational aims of becoming a creative community hub. If this transformation is to be successful, then these initial gains need to be maintained and built on.

Appendix 1

THE BIG ADVENTURE

A drawing and storytelling book

with Mencap Kingston

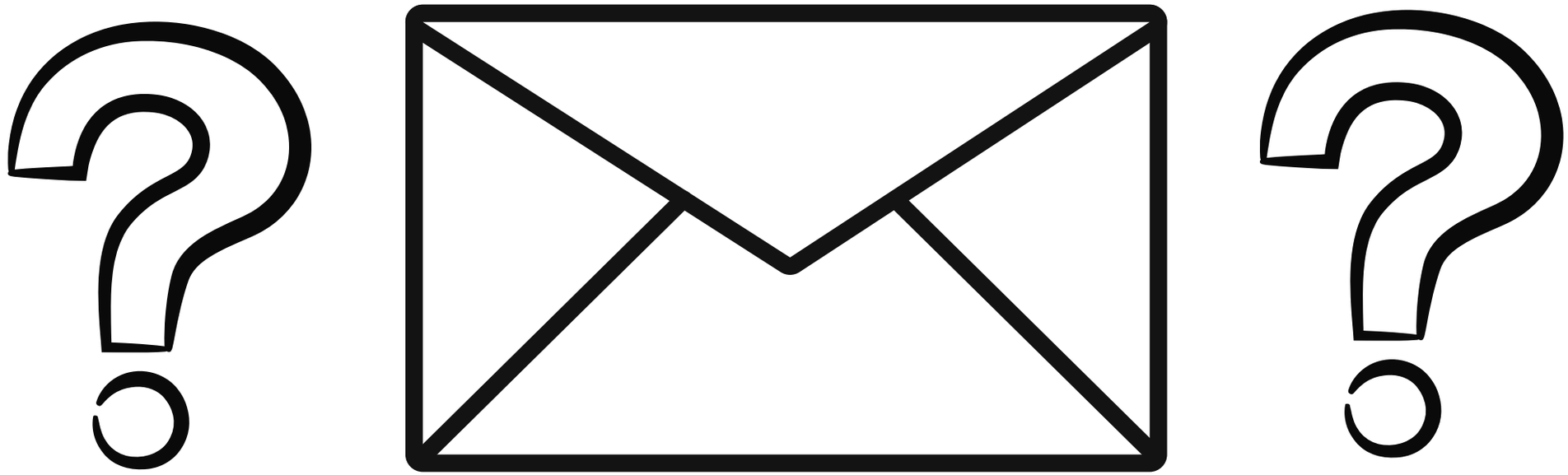
Have you got some paper and crayons?

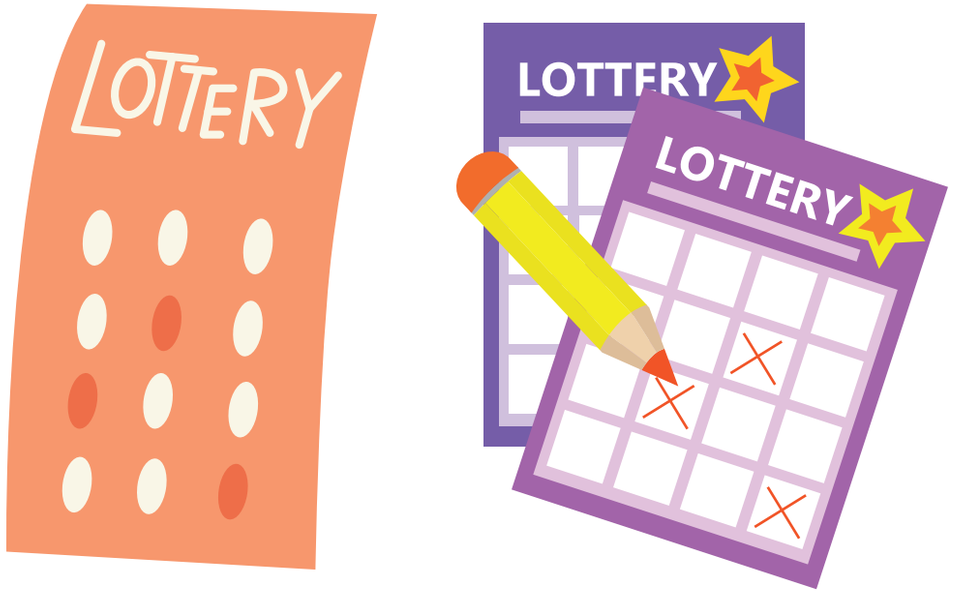
Are you ready to make a story?

You are?

Then let the story begin!!!

One day you received a letter





A message from the National Lottery

You have won one million pounds!!!!!

I don't believe it!!!

You have won one million pounds!

What would you buy with one million pounds?

A house?

A holiday?

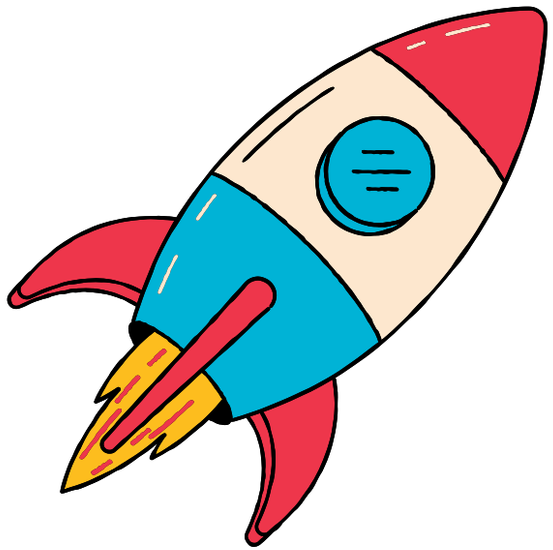
A party?

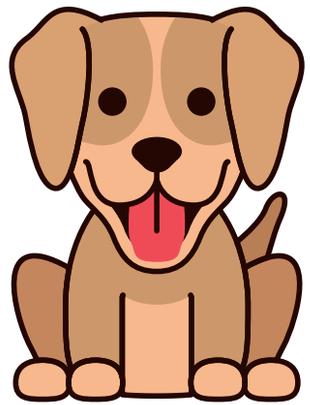
A present?

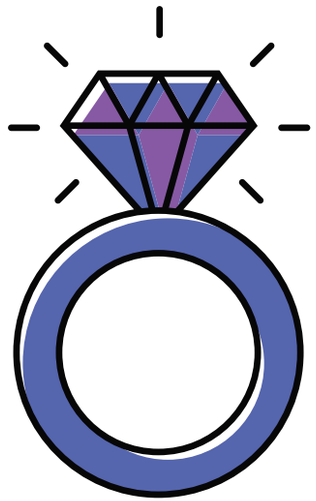
A pet?

A trip to the moon?

?





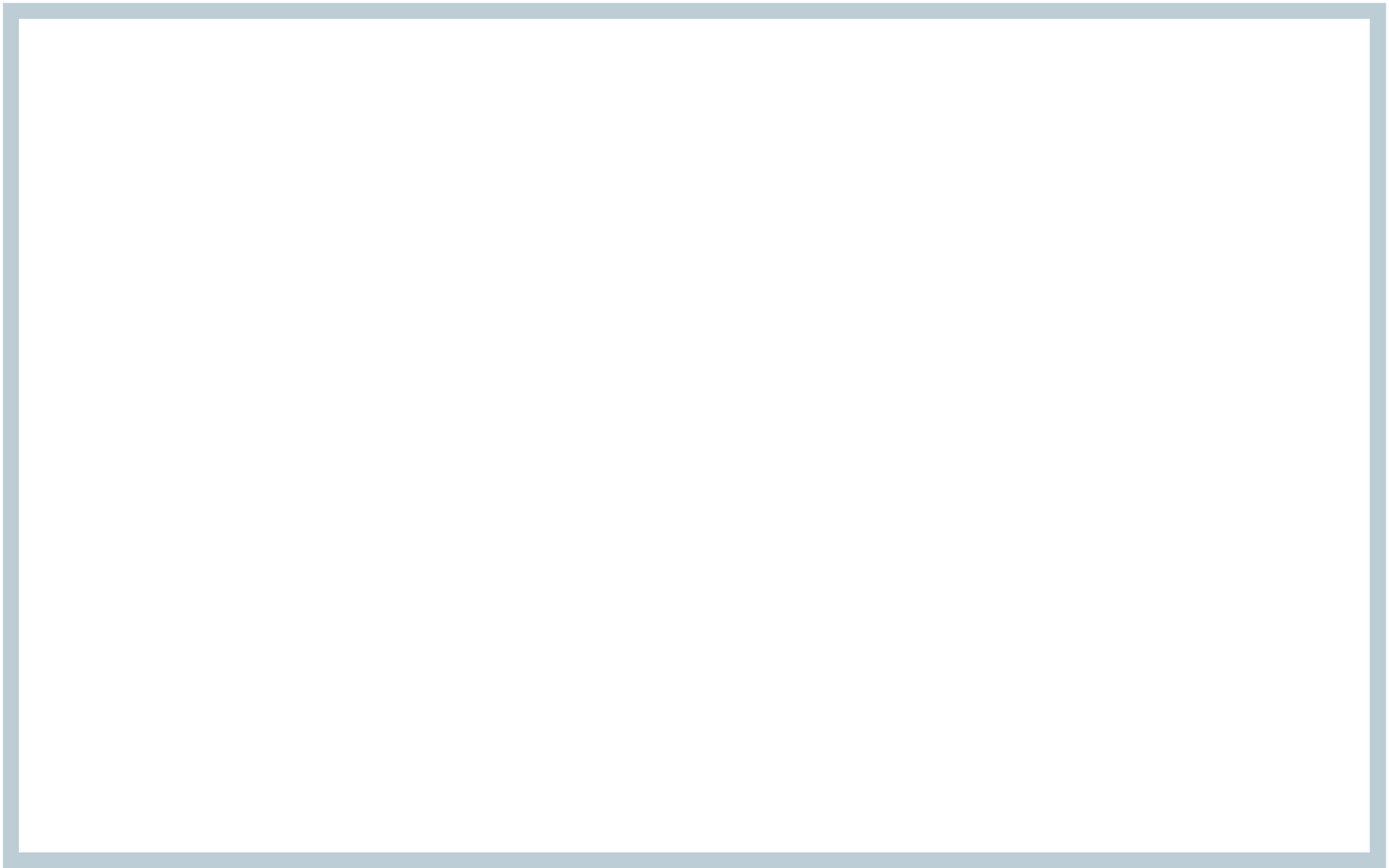


Now it's time to do a drawing

What would you buy with one million pounds?

What would you buy with a million pounds? Do you drawing here.

What would you buy with a million pounds? Do another drawing here.



Now you have decided what you will buy with a million pounds...

Turn the page for the next part of the story....

Oh no!!!!

The money has gone!!!!!

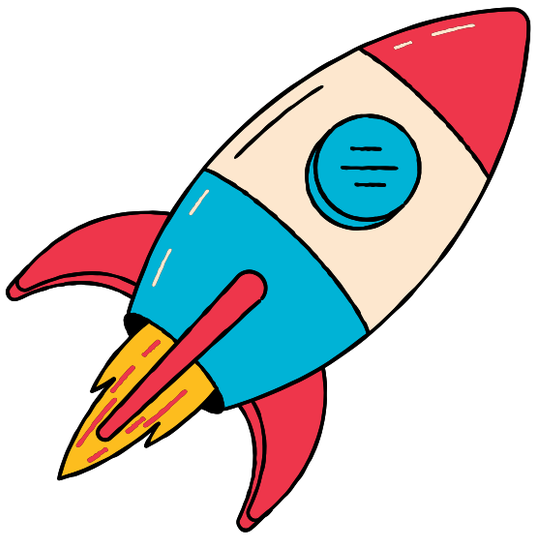
There was a dog....

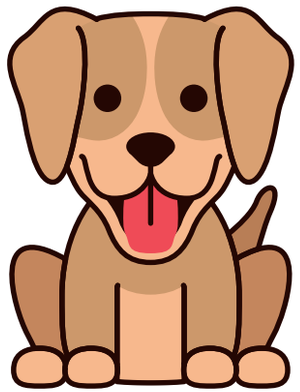
The dog looked for the money!!!

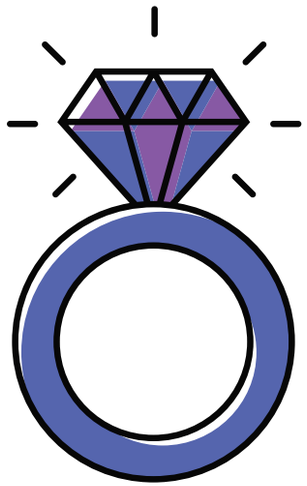
The dog found the money !!!

You had a party!!!!

You had the best time of your life!!!





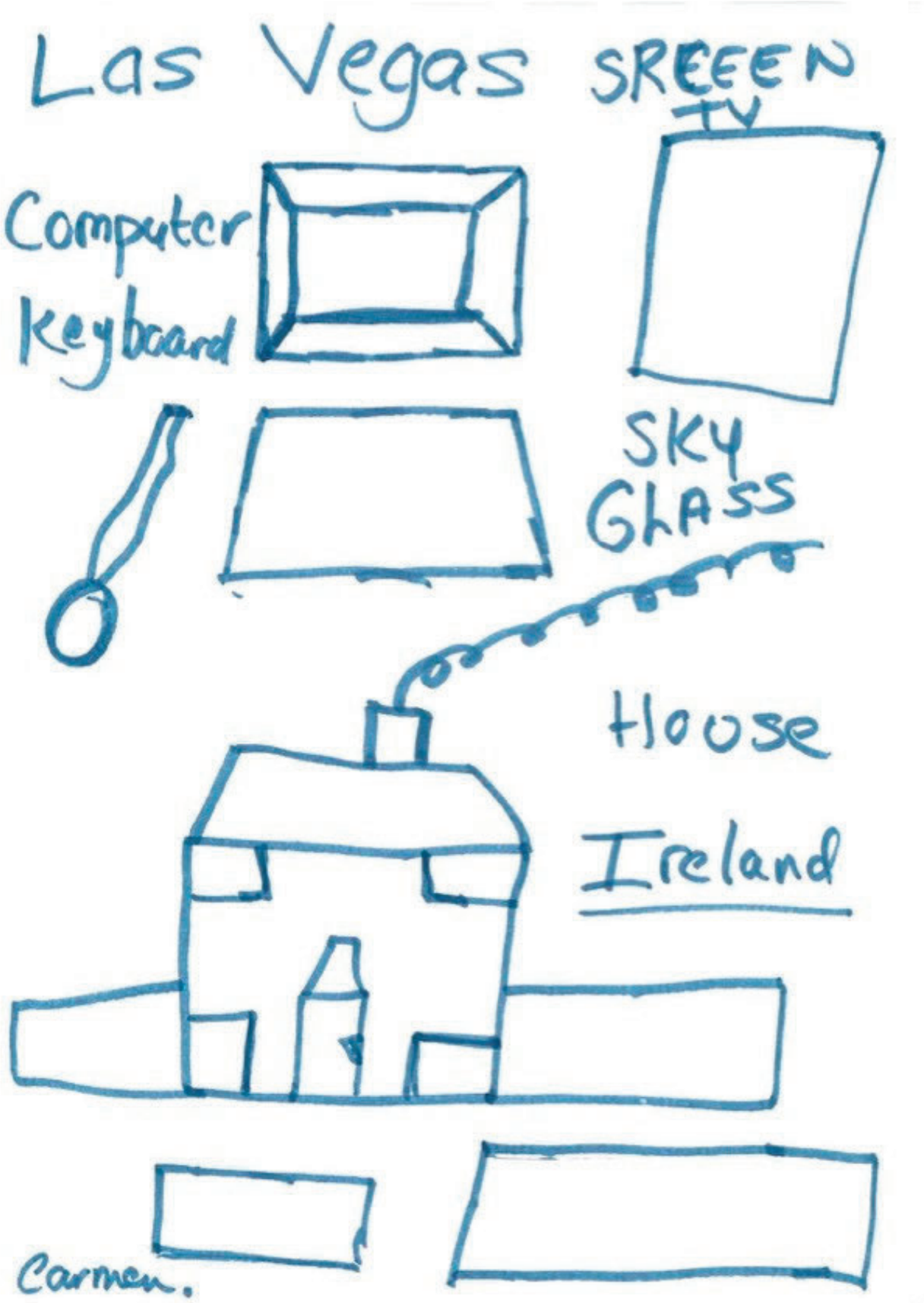


YOU SPENT ONE MILLION POUNDS!!!

THE END

On the next pages you can see some drawings from Mencap members

They drew these pictures after they heard the story


Las Vegas
SREEEN
TV
Computer
Keyboard
SKY
GLASS
House
Ireland
Carmen.

Carmen

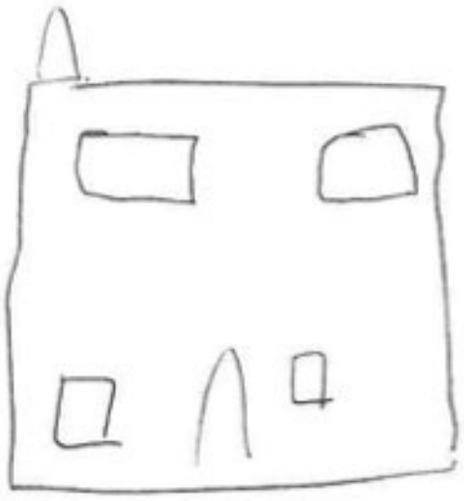
Tippu

Emily

Leyla

New home to buy monday for Birthday

Summing my Drien and

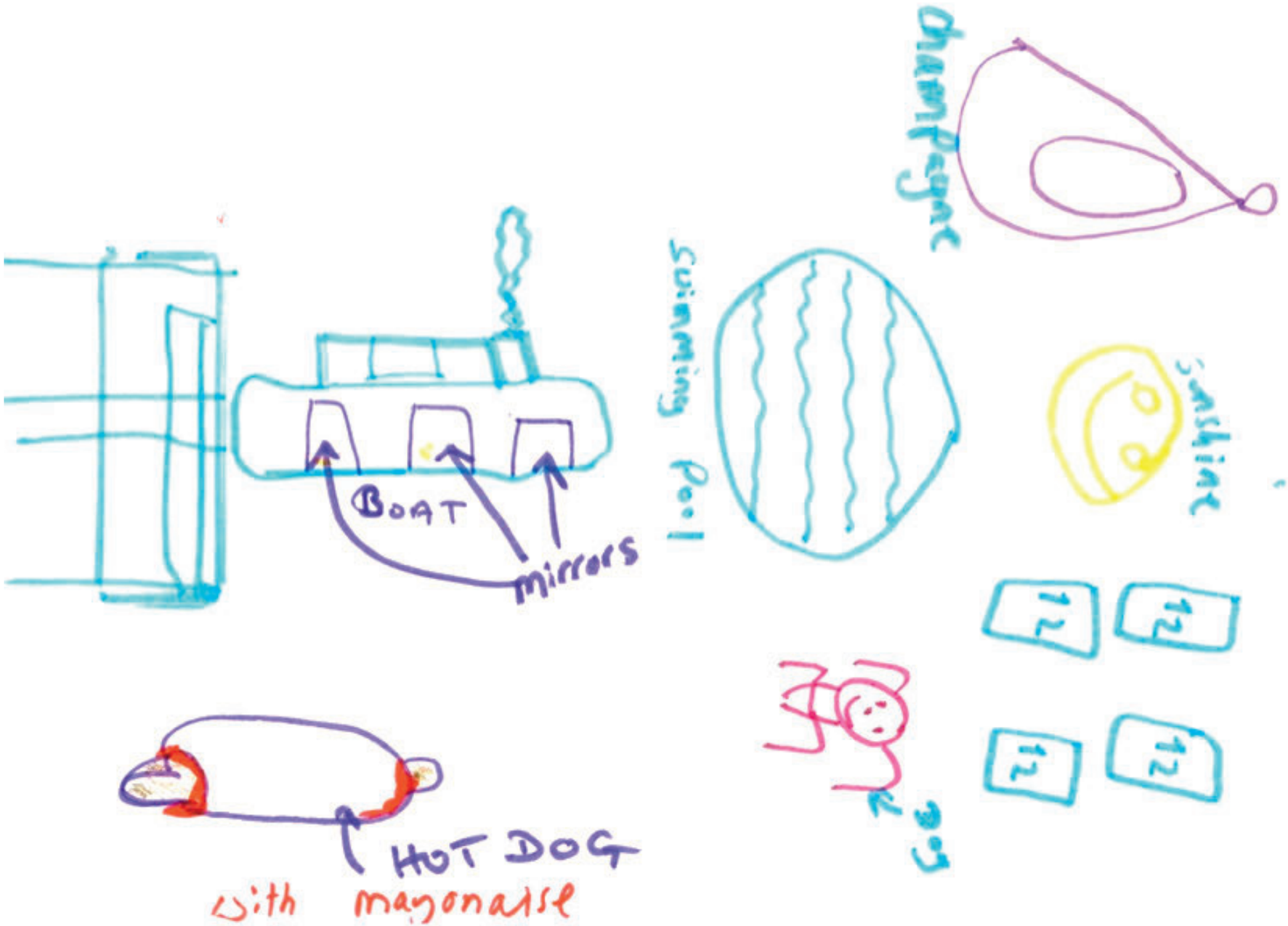


New home

Westflie life westflie my Drien

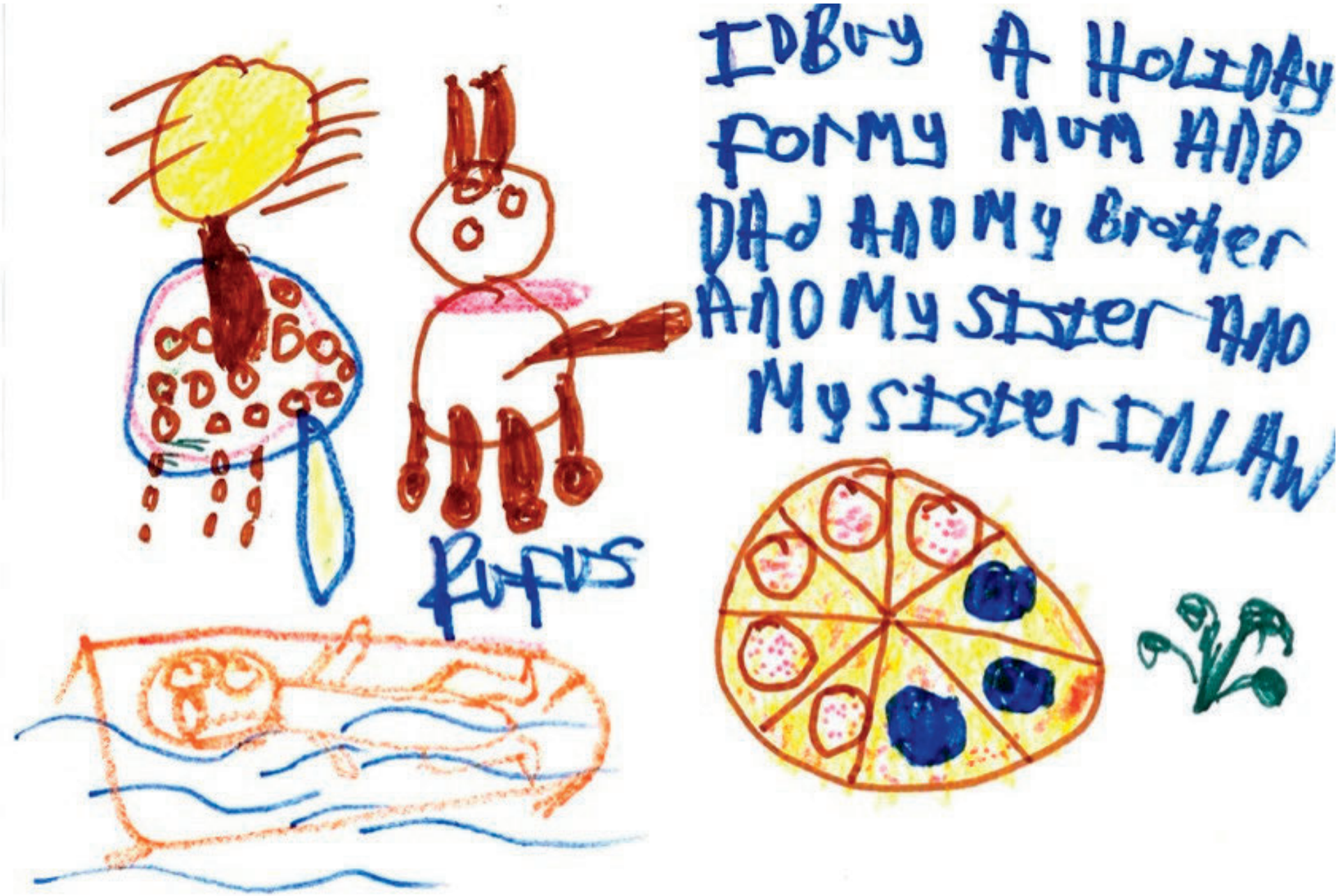
Shane Nicyc Mirk K.

Leyla


champagne
swimming pool
sunshine
BOAT
mirrors
12
12
12
12
HOT DOG
with mayonaise

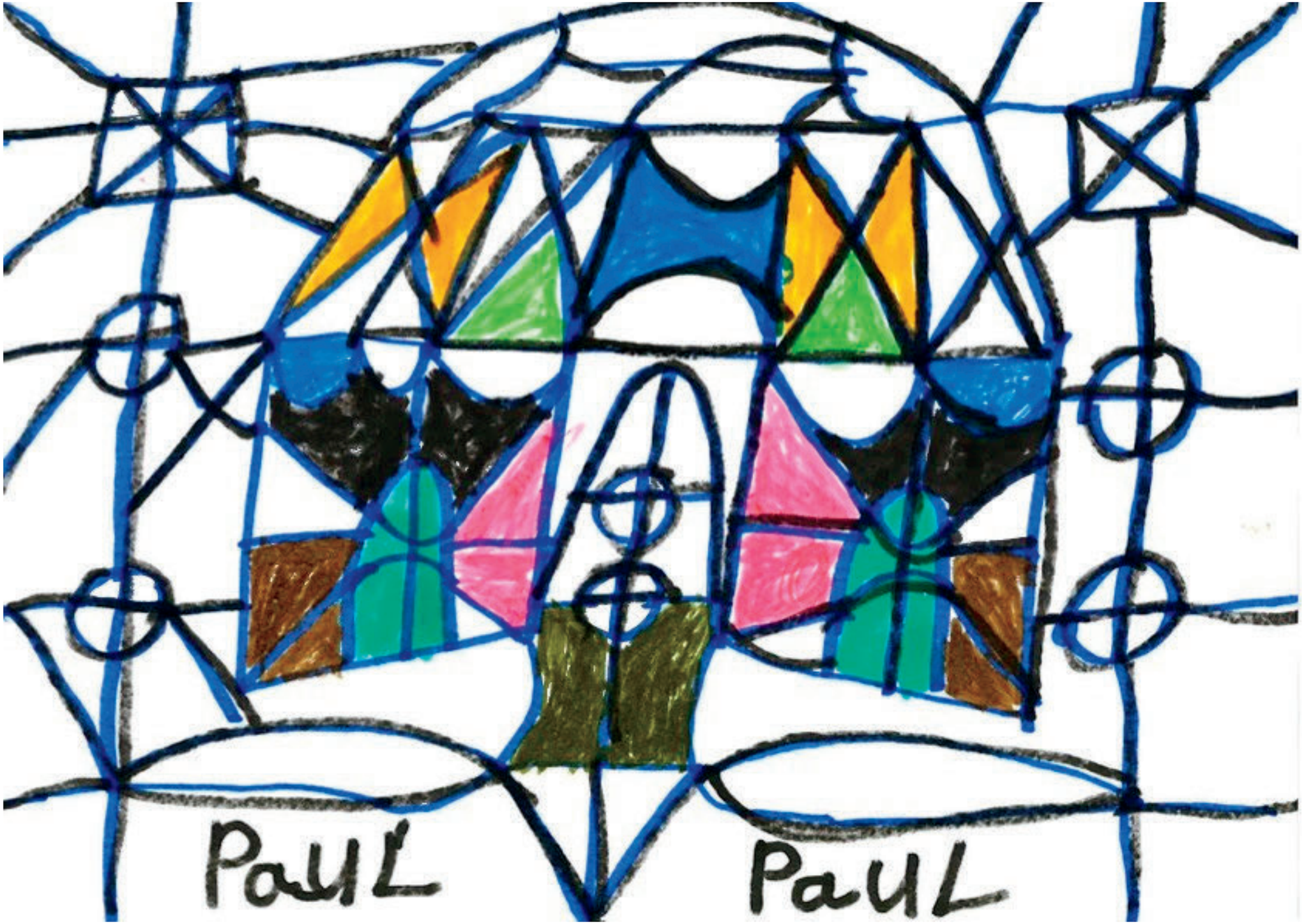
Sebastian

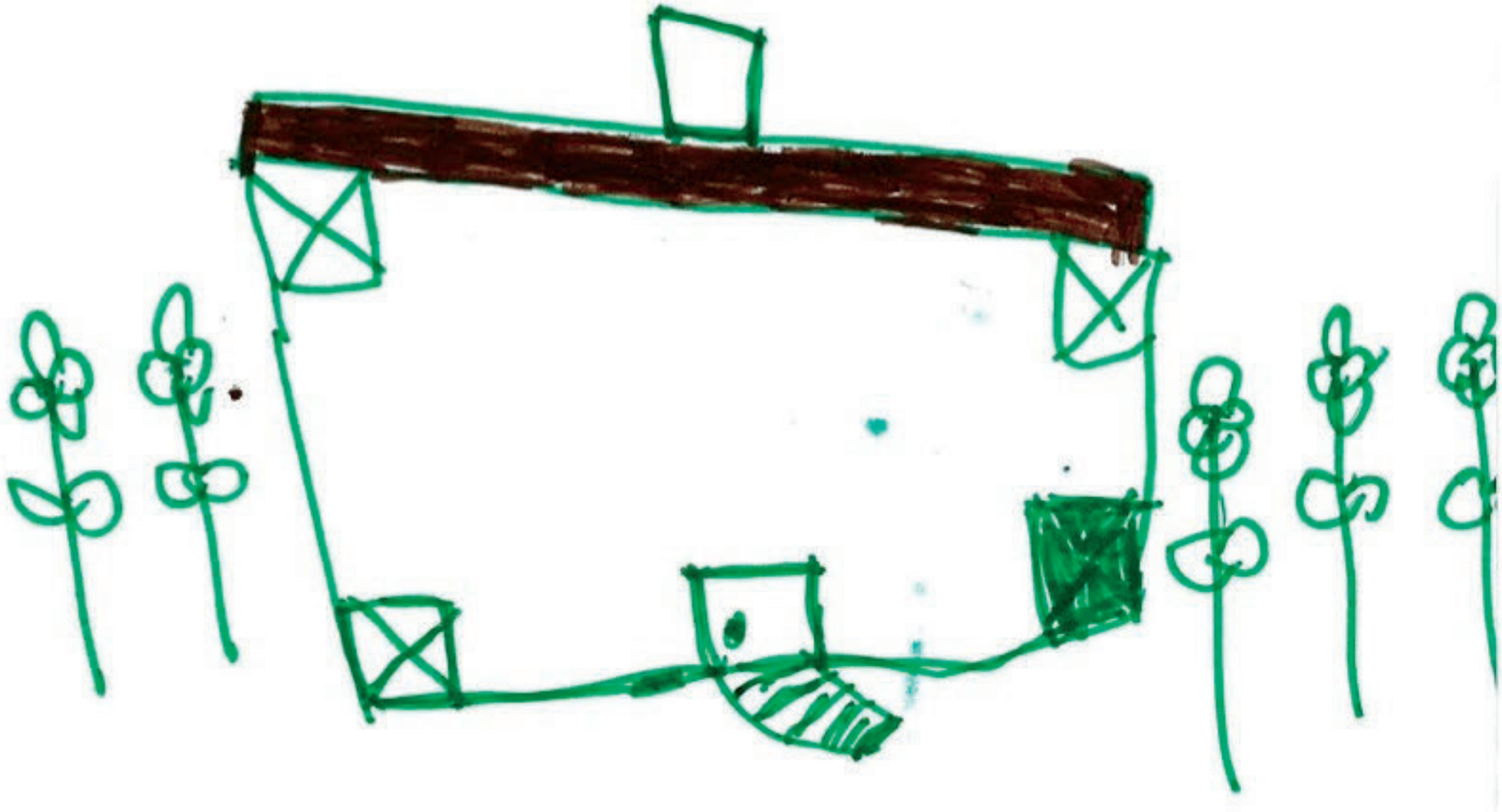
Rosie


I'd buy a holiday
for my mum and
dad and my brother
and my sister and
my sister in law
Rufus

Katie

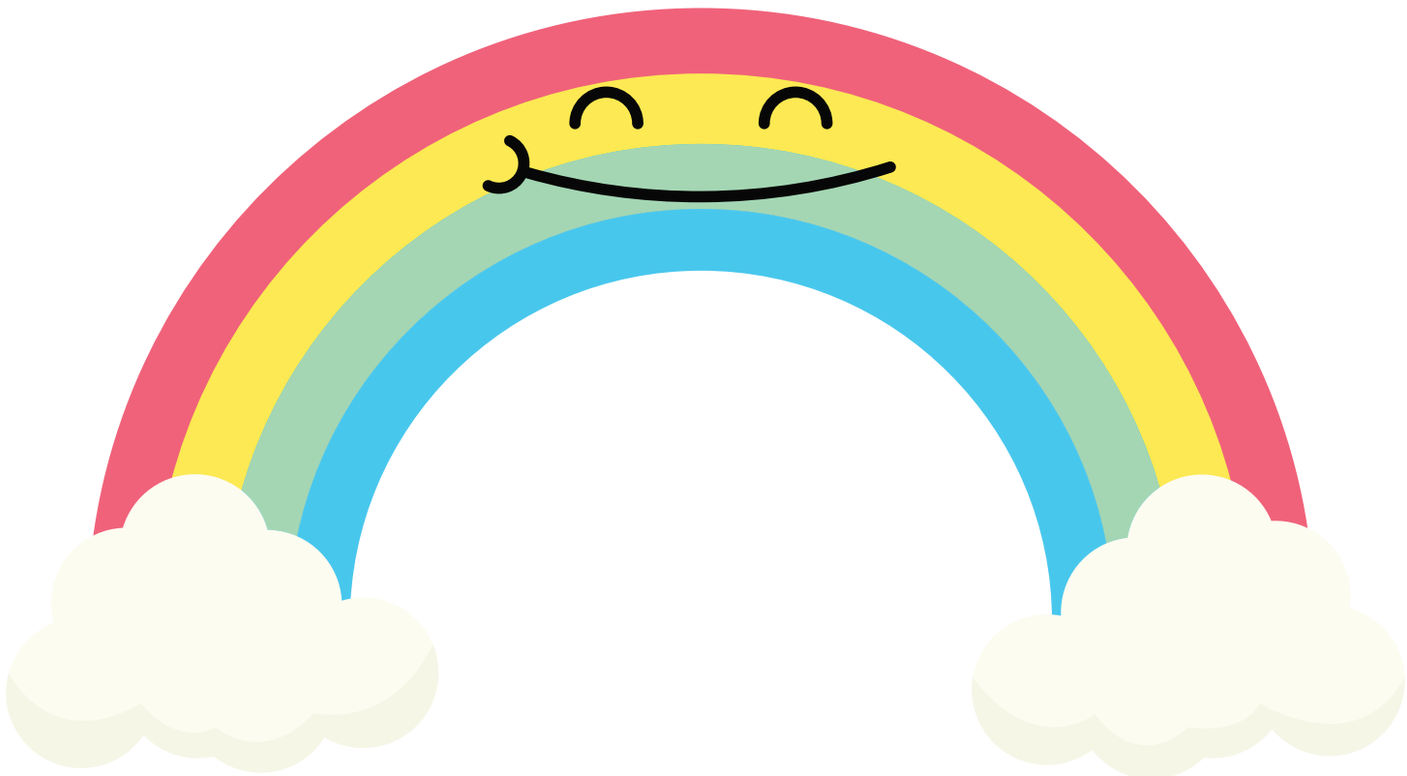
Nicky


PAUL
PAUL



Michael

Thank you for reading this book, acting out the story and doing some drawing



With many thanks to everyone who helped us to make this book:

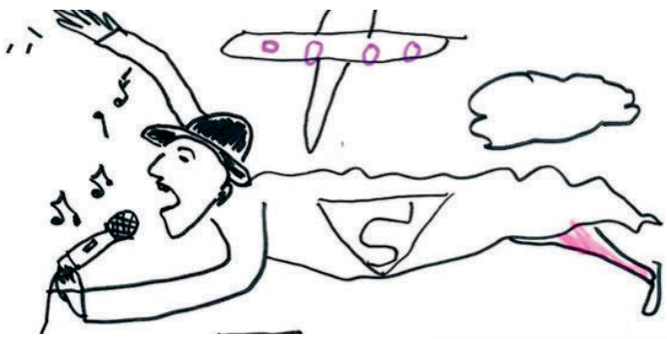
Vince and Nicola
and
Carmen, Tippu, Emily, Leyla, Sebastian, Kim, Rosie, Katie, Nicky, Paul, Michael

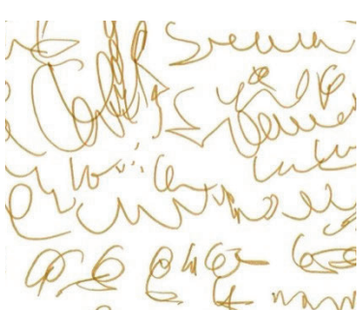
This book is part of a project called 'Asset Based Storytelling in Kingston'. It was run by Kingston Libraries, Kingston University and storyteller Richard Neville between 2021 and 2022

LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
local mencap Kingston
Kingston University London
THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Appendix 2

The Big Book of Superheroes



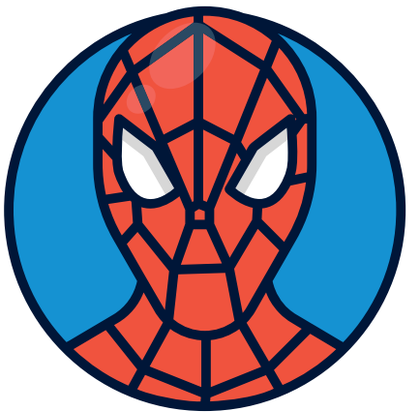


with Mencap Kingston

Pretend you are a superhero

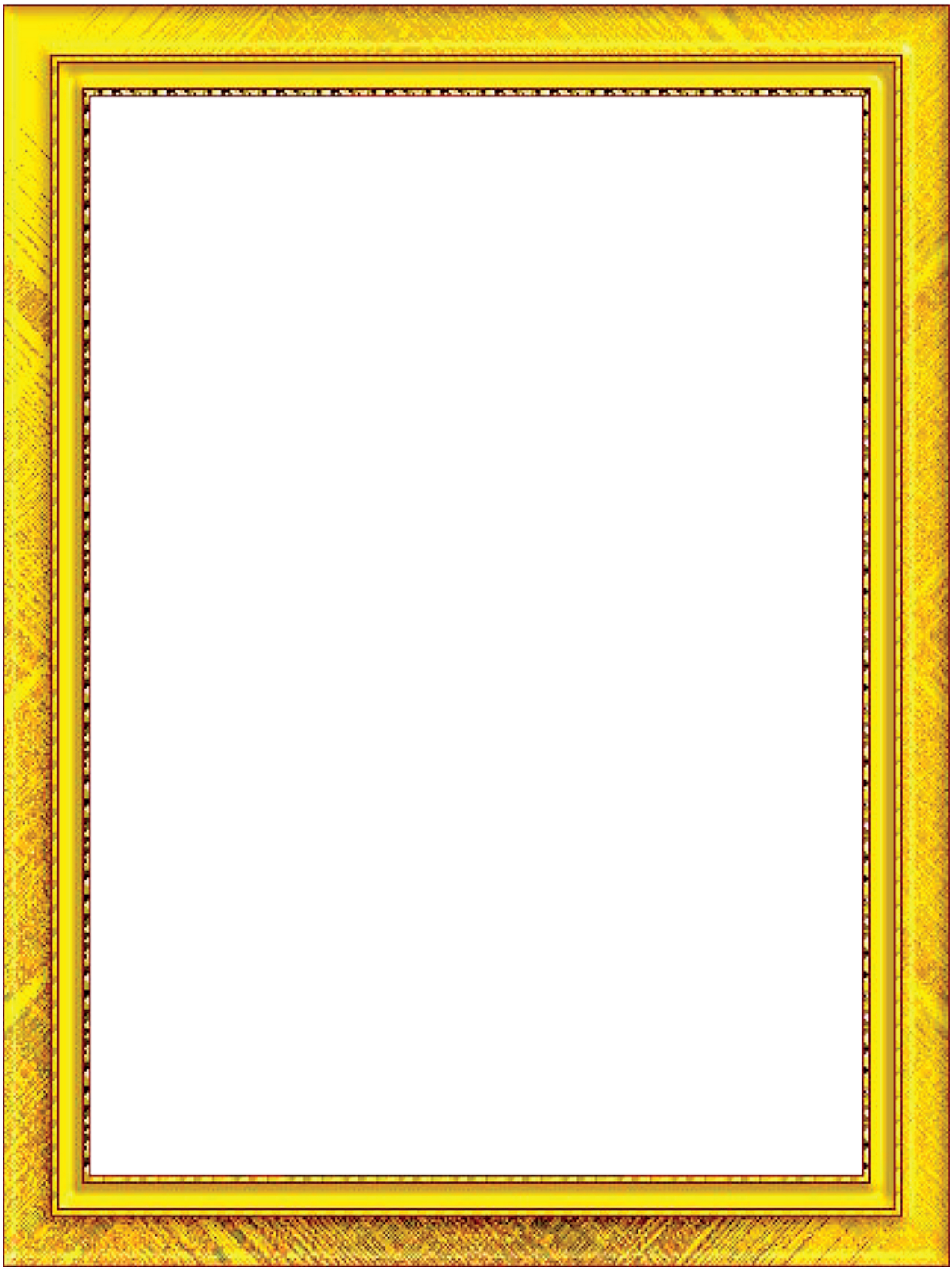
What special power would you like to have?

Here are some ideas...

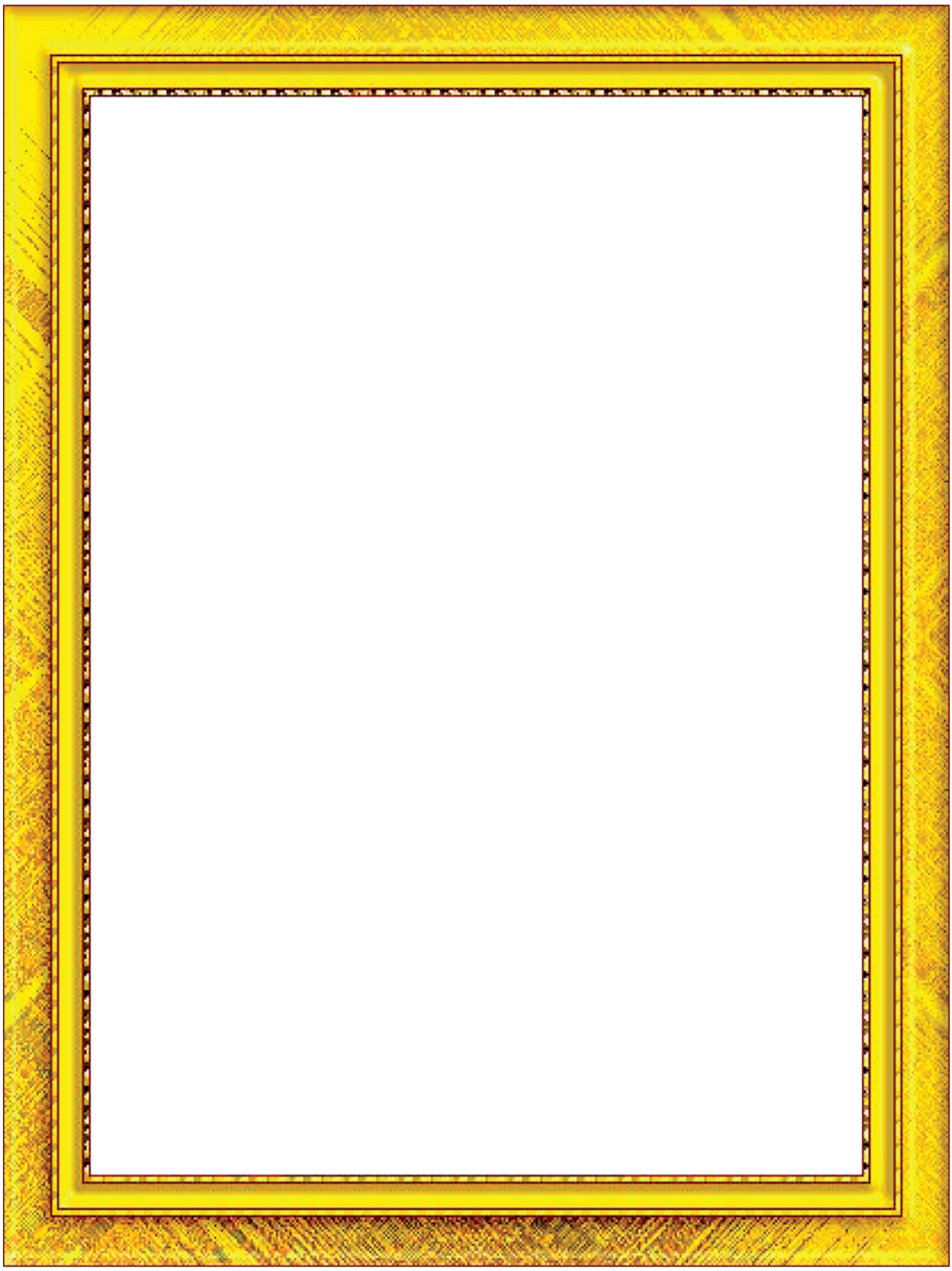


ZAP!

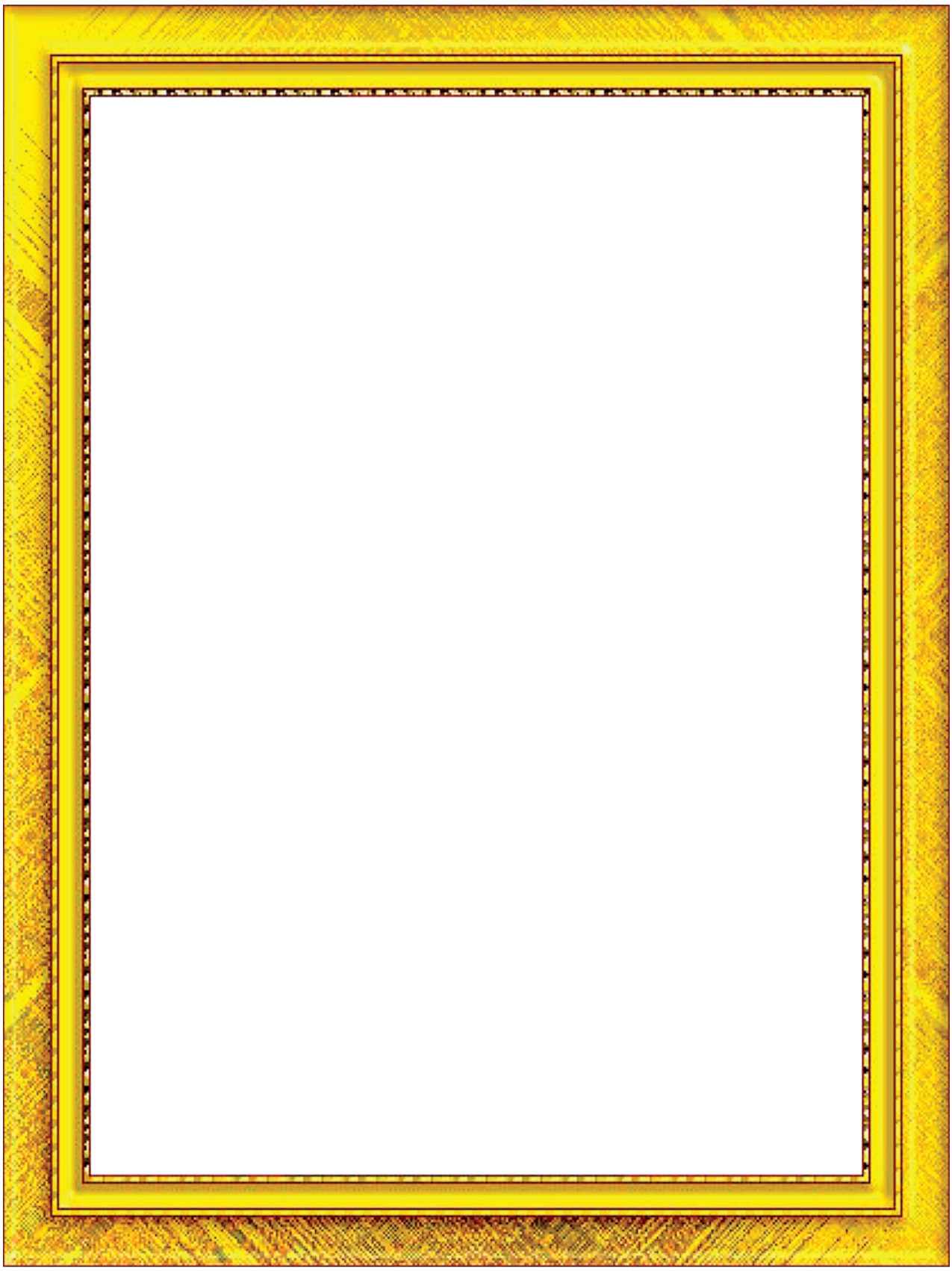
Now do some drawings that show yourself as a super-hero



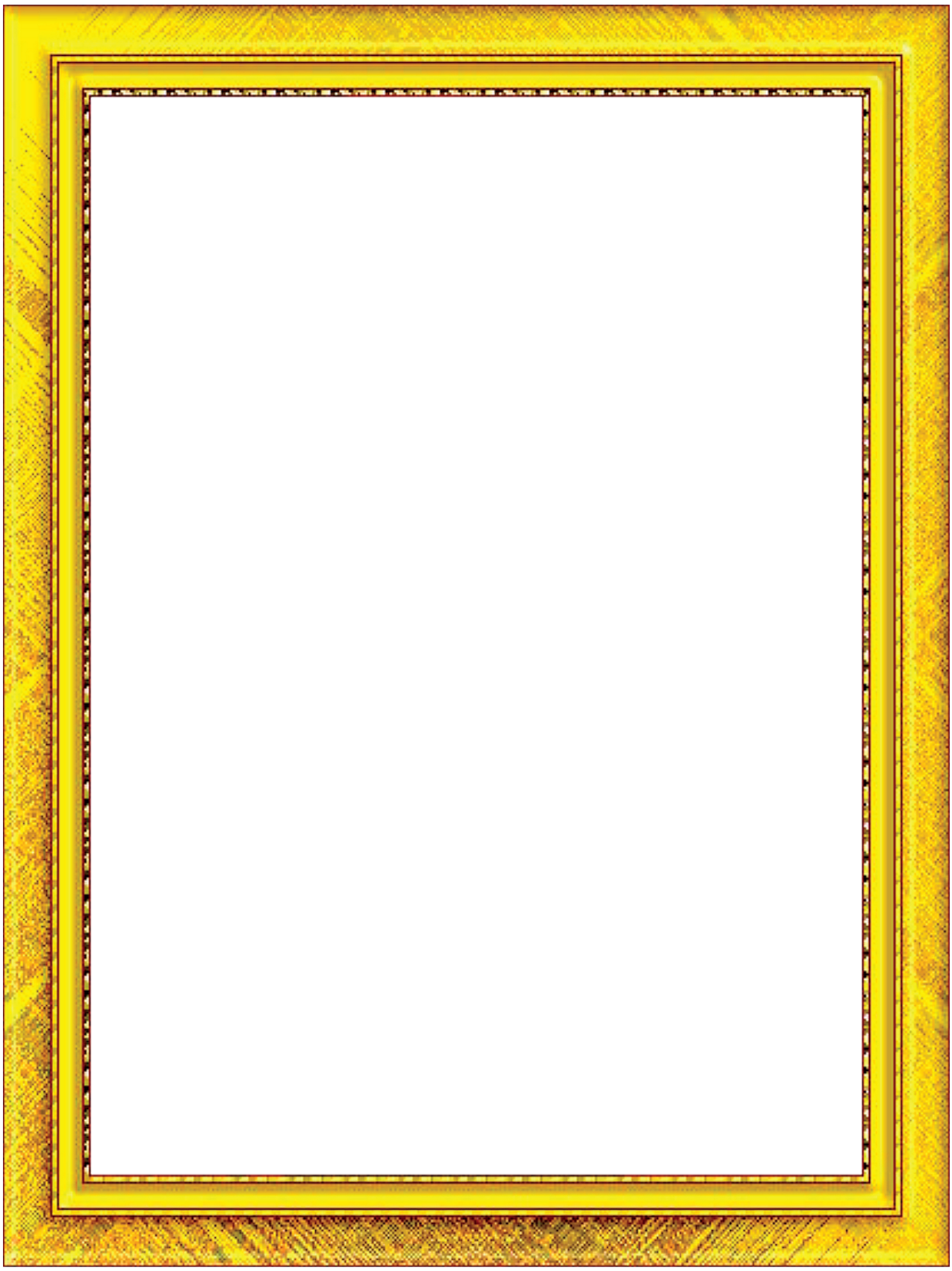
Me with my super-power



Me with my super-power



Me with my super-power

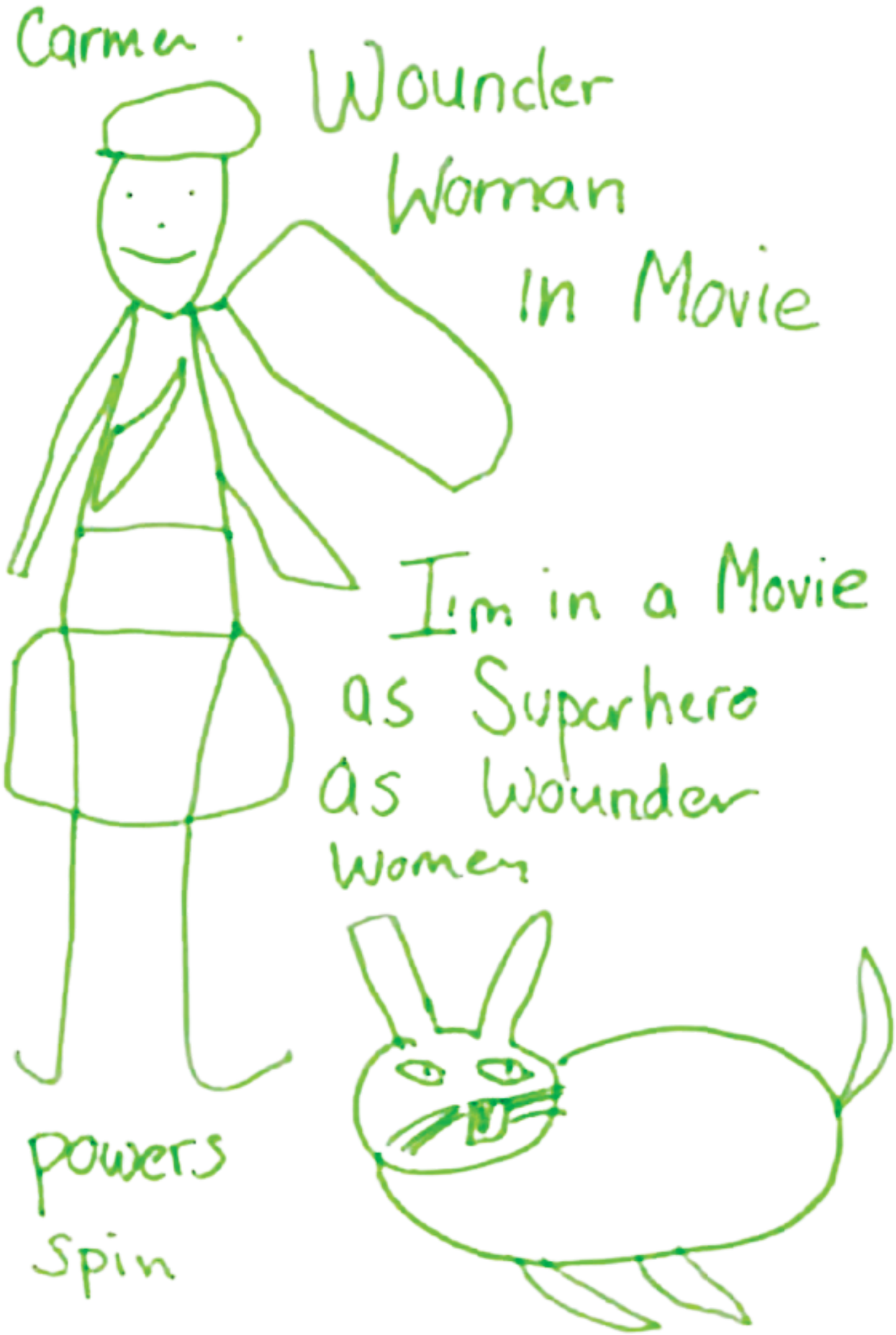


Me with my super-power

The members of Mencap did some drawings to show the superpower they would like to have. You can see the drawings on the next pages

Rebecca - Flying

Sebastian


Carmen
Wounder Woman
In Movie
Im in a Movie
as Superhero
as Wounder Women
powers
Spin

Carmen

Rosie

Save the elephants.

Elephant girl Emma

The elephant super hero.

Emma

LeyLA

Wonnier
Woman Girl

Sri

Sepman
Woman

Super Woma He birthday
remember lady.

Red Blue Colouring

Leyla

KATIE
SUPER
CAT
WOMAN
MY SUPERPOWERS ARE FLYING TO THE
MOON AND BACK

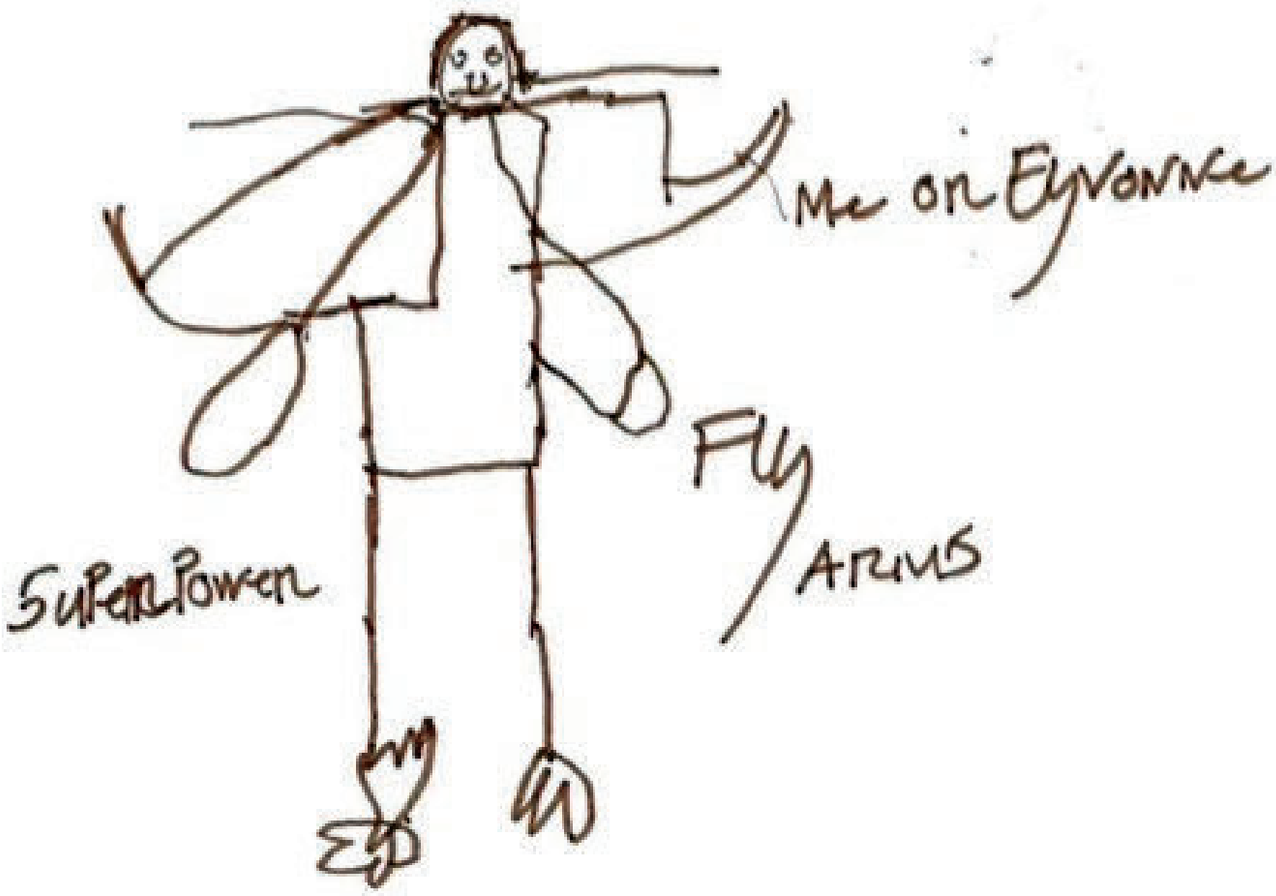
Katie

Super Deirdre the
Dog Rescuer

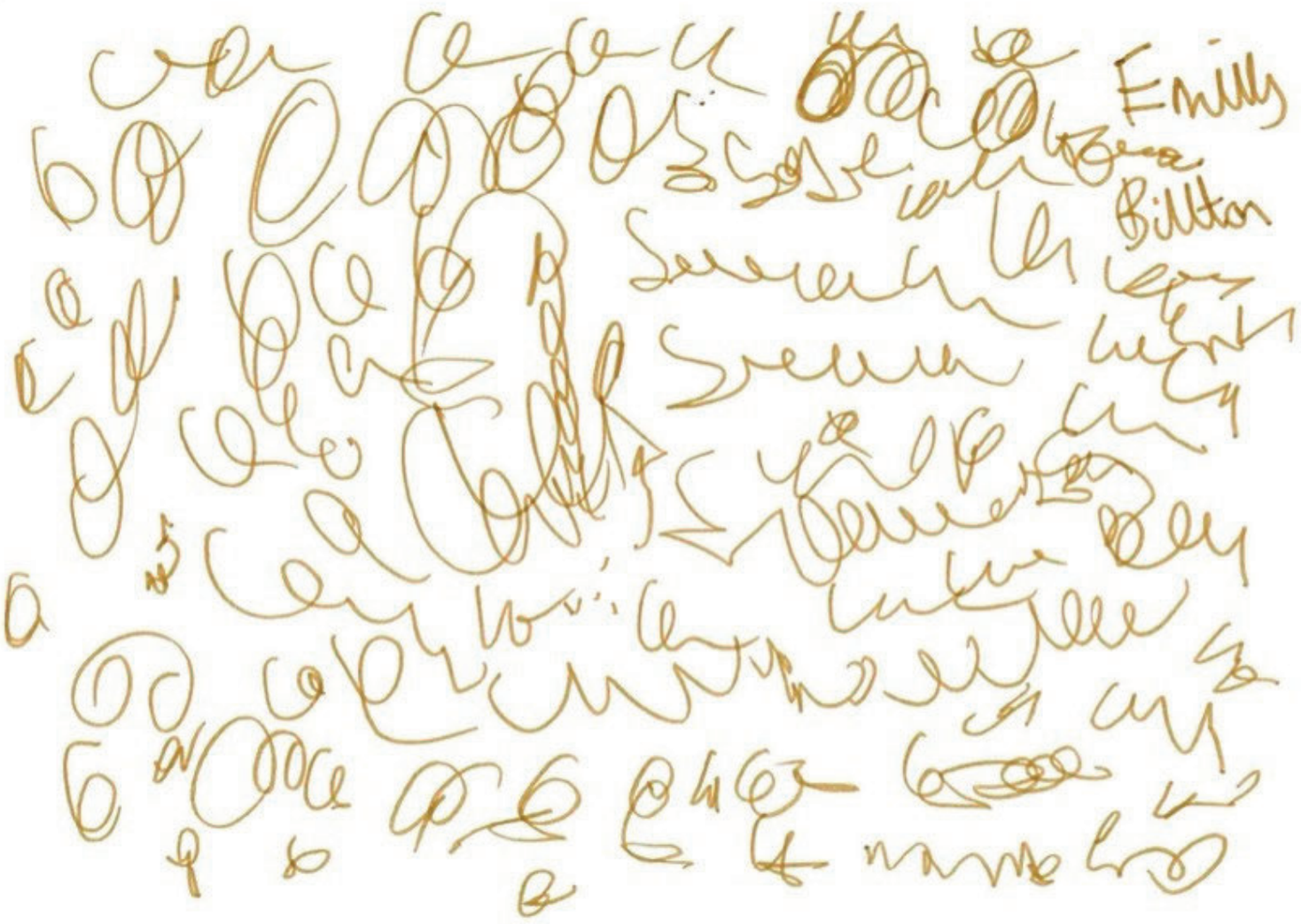
Superhero

Kim

Wonder Woman



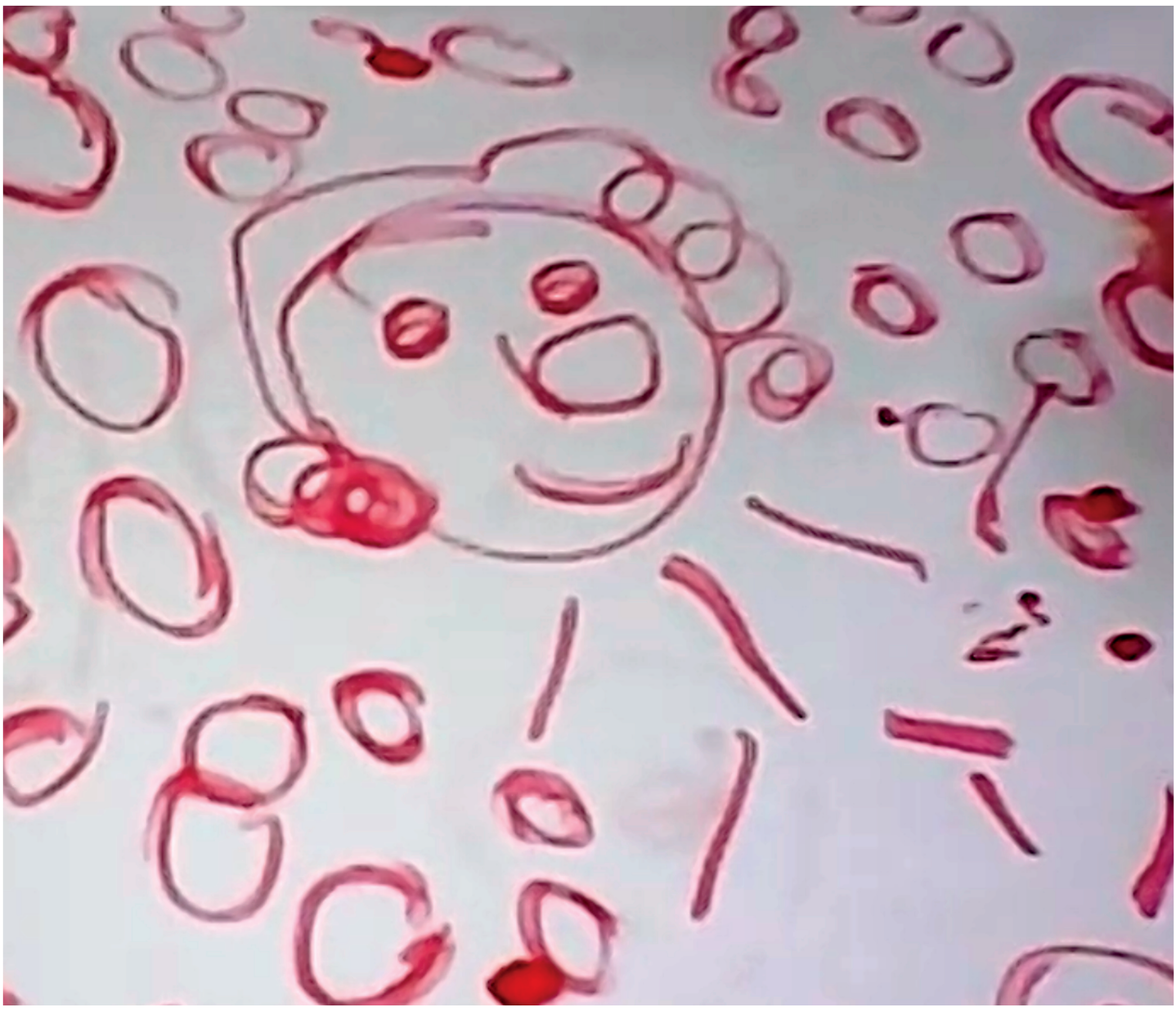
Kim



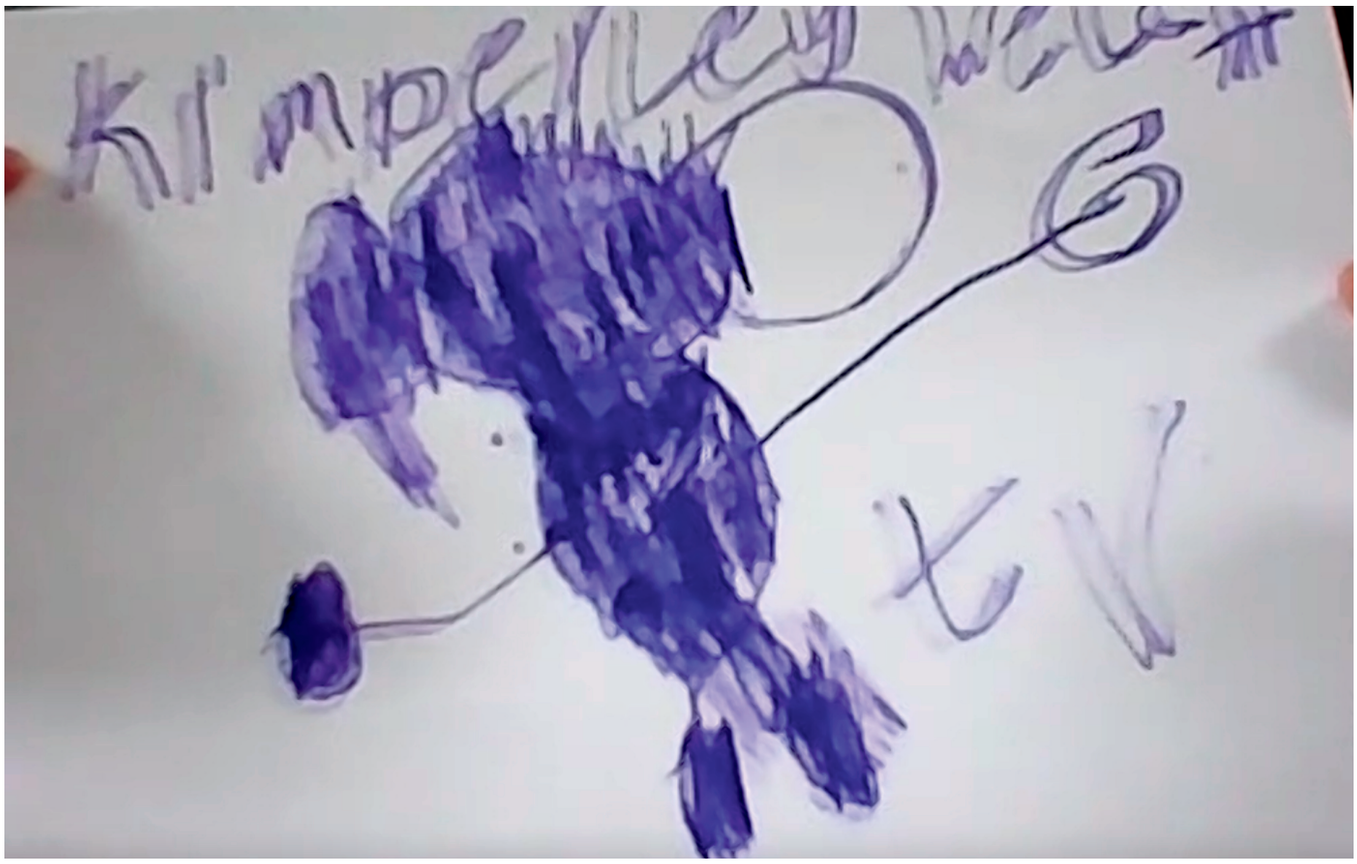
Nicky

Michael Super Strong!

Paul, The Flying Object, on his way to have tea at Buckingham Palace



Nicky drew his Supermum!



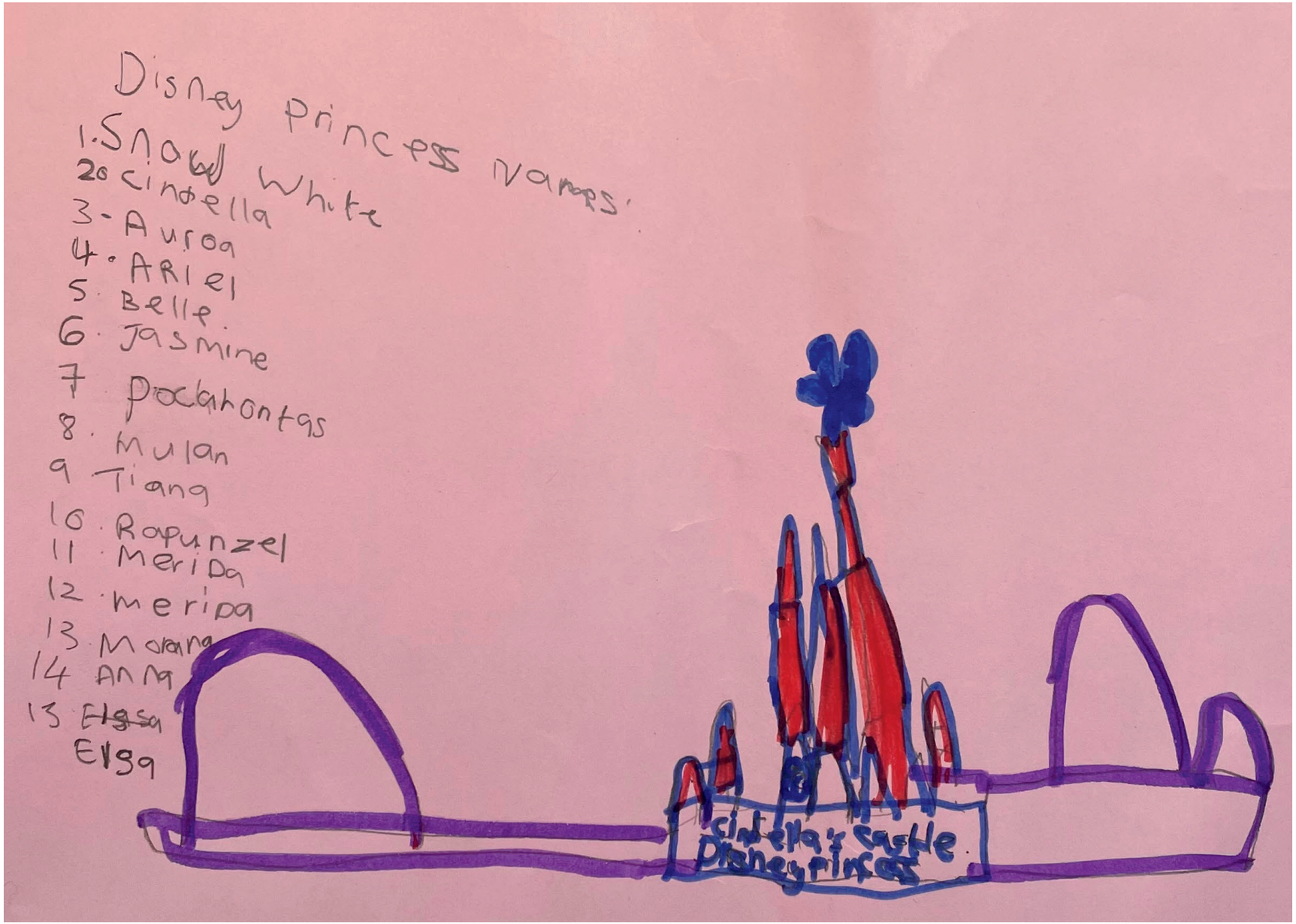
Kimberley drew Tracey Beaker!

Duckman

Super Powers

- Swim Under the Sea
- Fly in the Sky
- Characteristics from Donald and Daffy Duck
- Water off a duck's back

Jack



Karen drew a castle for 15 Superheroes, all the Disney Princesses! How many of them do you know?

Thank you for reading this book and doing some drawing and colouring

With many thanks to
everyone who helped us to
make this book:

Vince and Nicola
and
Rebecca, Sebastian, Carmen,
Rosie, Emma, Leyla, Katie,
Deirdre, Kim, Nicky, Michael,
Paul, Kimberley, Jack, Karen

This book is part of a project called 'Asset Based Storytelling in Kingston'. It was run by Kingston Libraries, Kingston University and storyteller Richard Neville between 2021 and 2022

LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
local mencap Kingston
Kingston University London
THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Appendix 3

The Big Book of Questions

A drawing and storytelling book

with Kingston Mencap

Type text here

In 2022 Kingston Libraries worked with Kingston Mencap.

We asked Mencap members three questions. They gave us many different answers.

We used the answers to inspire drawings and tell stories

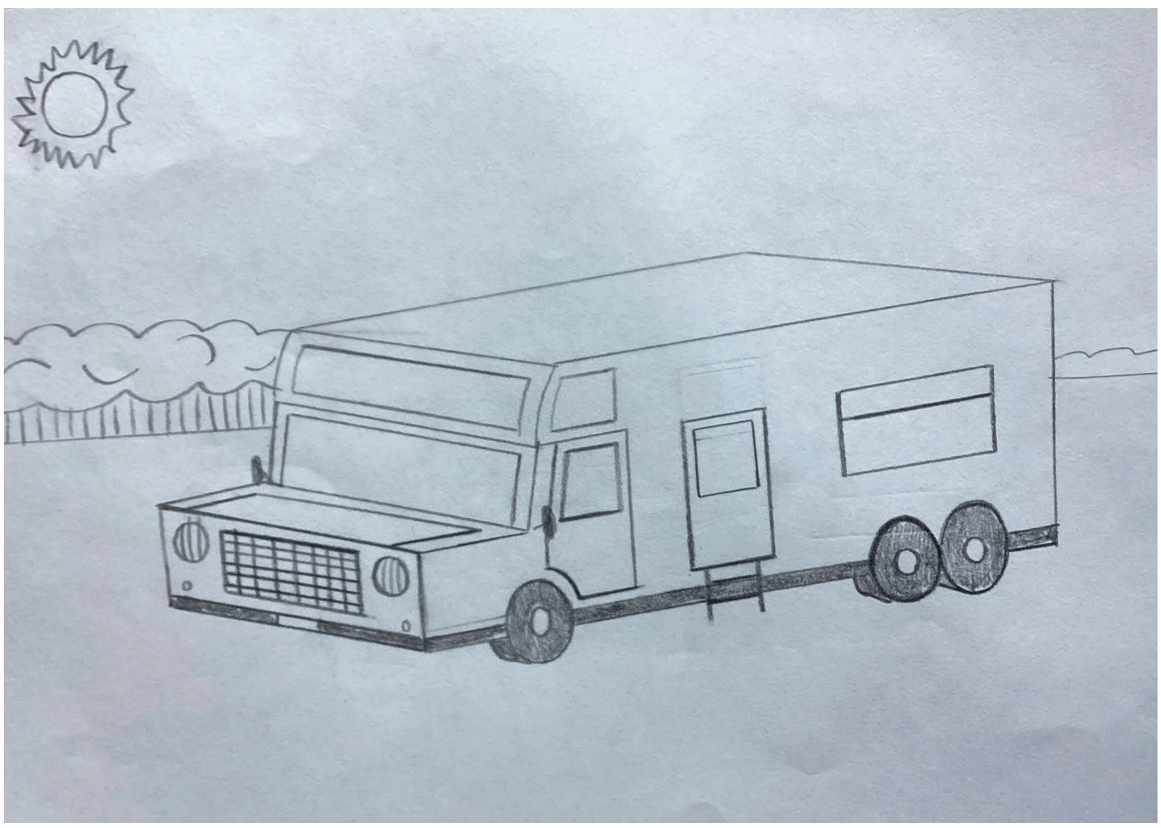
Question 1
Ghost Stories
What would you put in your perfect ghost story?

Drawing by Jack

The answers were: ghosts, witches, vampires, bats, werewolves, zombies

Question 2
Three Wishes

If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?

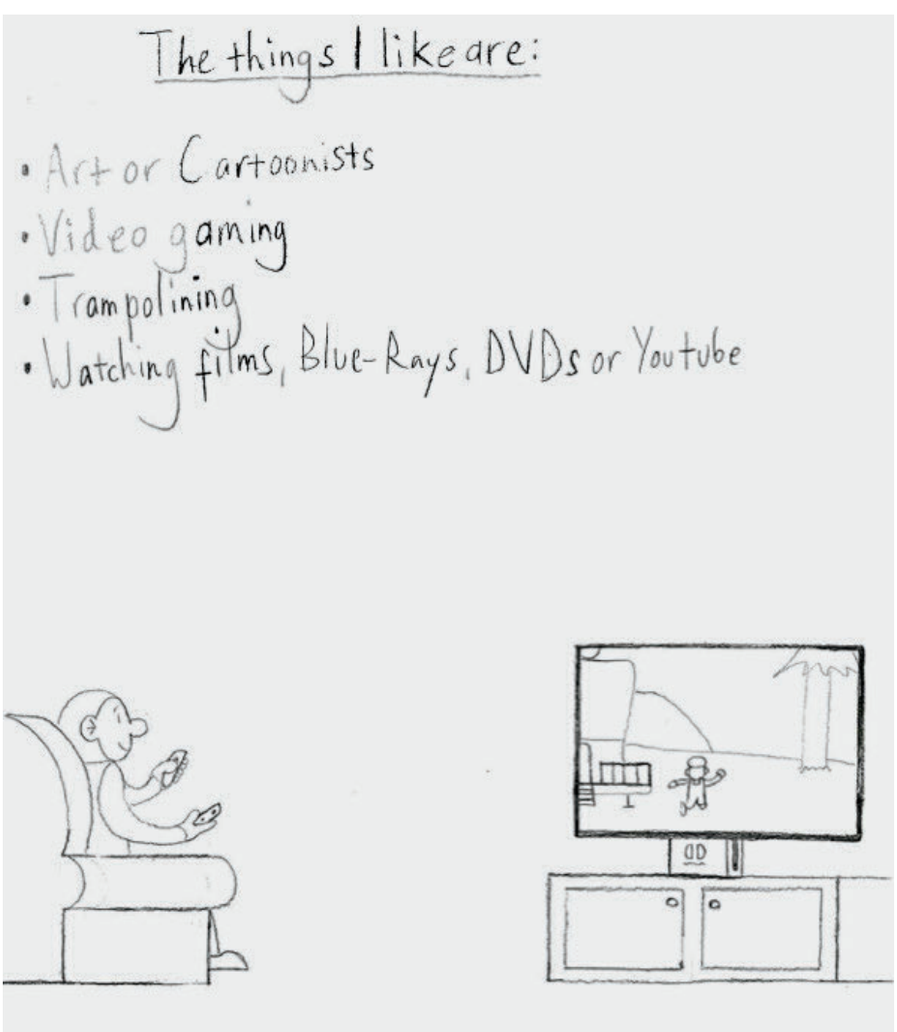


Drawing by Jack

The answers were: food, flowers, friends, understanding, happiness, a minibus...

Question 3
Things I Like

What do you like?
We asked Mencap members and they told us the things they like:
Animals, sunshine, holidays, friends, mum and dad, cars, houses, films, games, a red cushion, fish and chips...



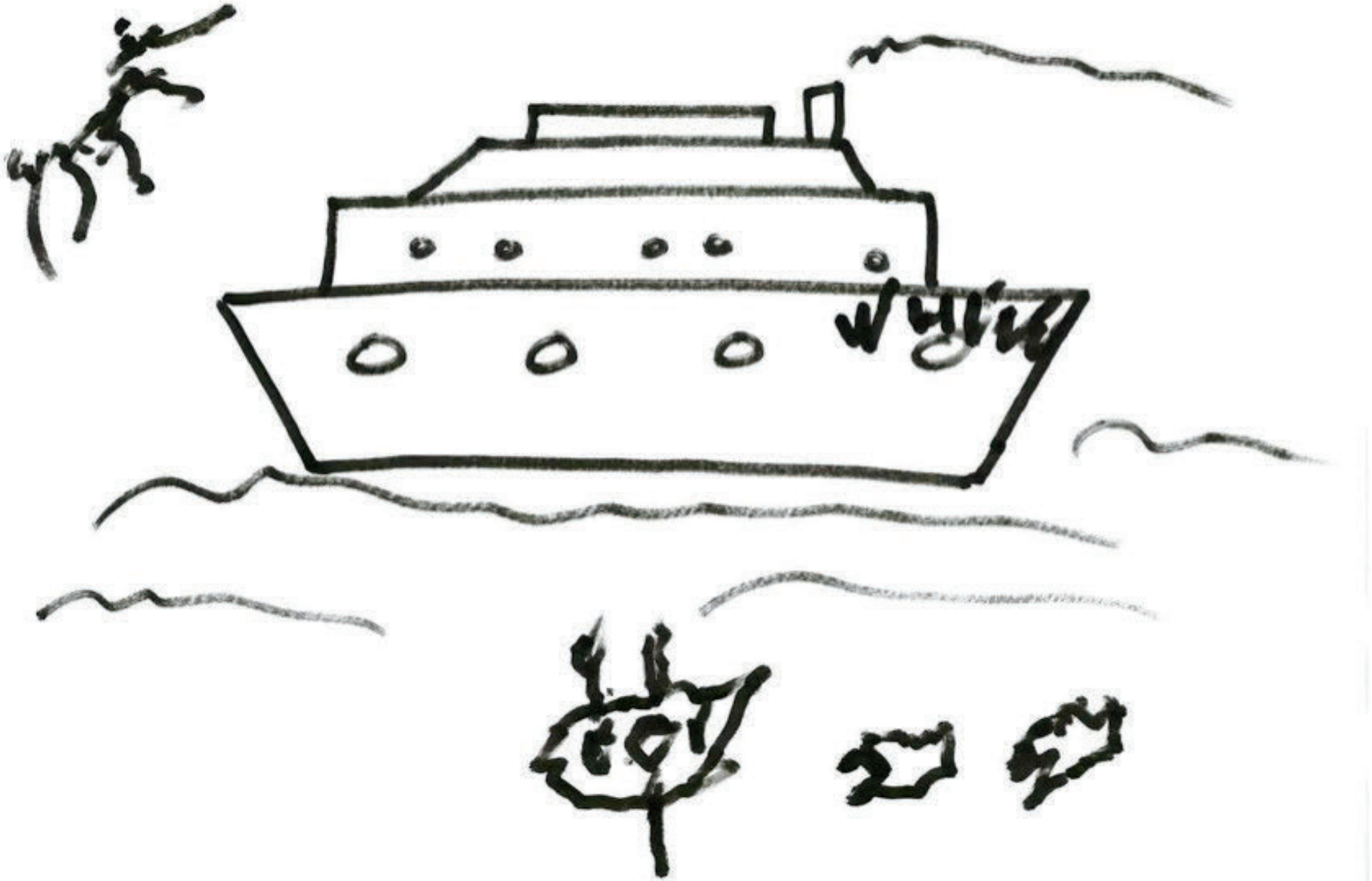
Drawing by Jack

Here are some drawings that Mencap members did to answer the three questions

There are many talented artists here!

Look at these pictures and do a picture of your own!!

Paul



Michael

Katie

Leyla.

Westflie

Nicky

Shante

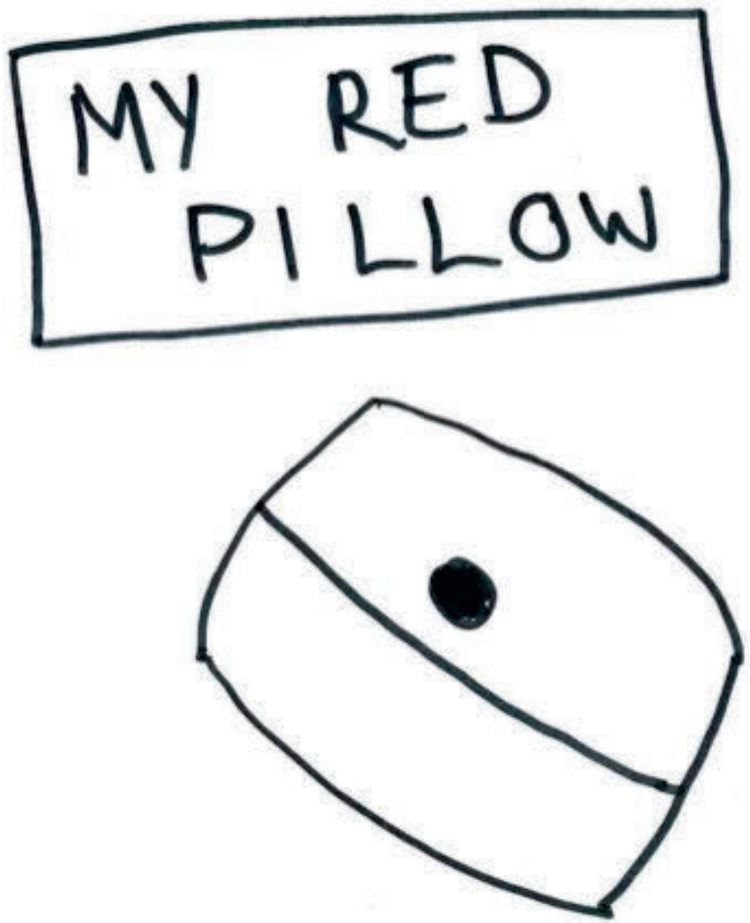
Mark

Kinre

Brinay

Carmen

ANNABEL

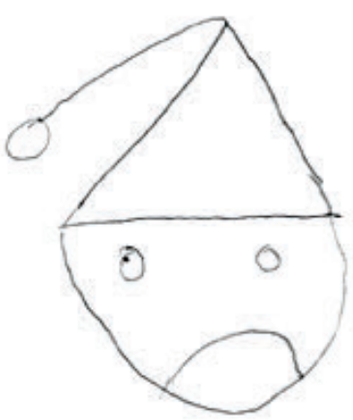


MAX

Party

Danising

Happy Birthday

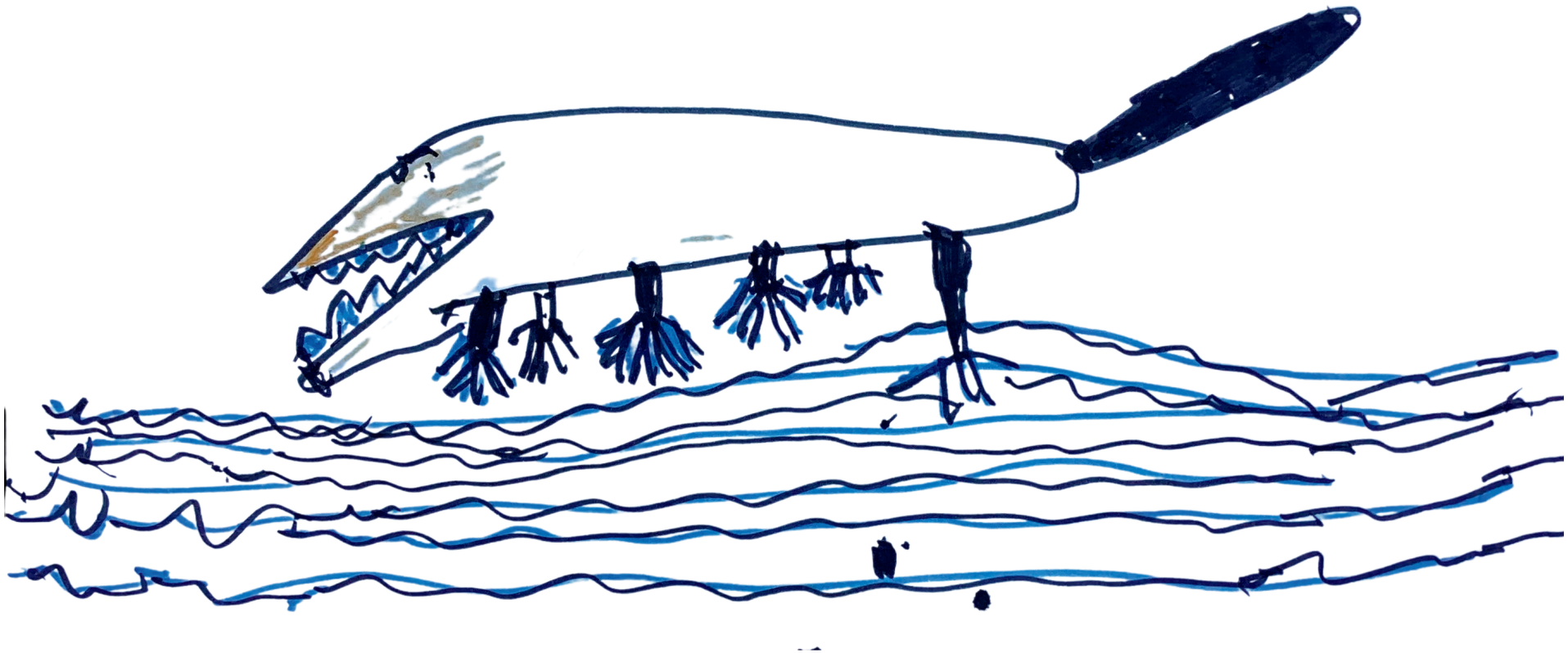


Christmas

Fir worke

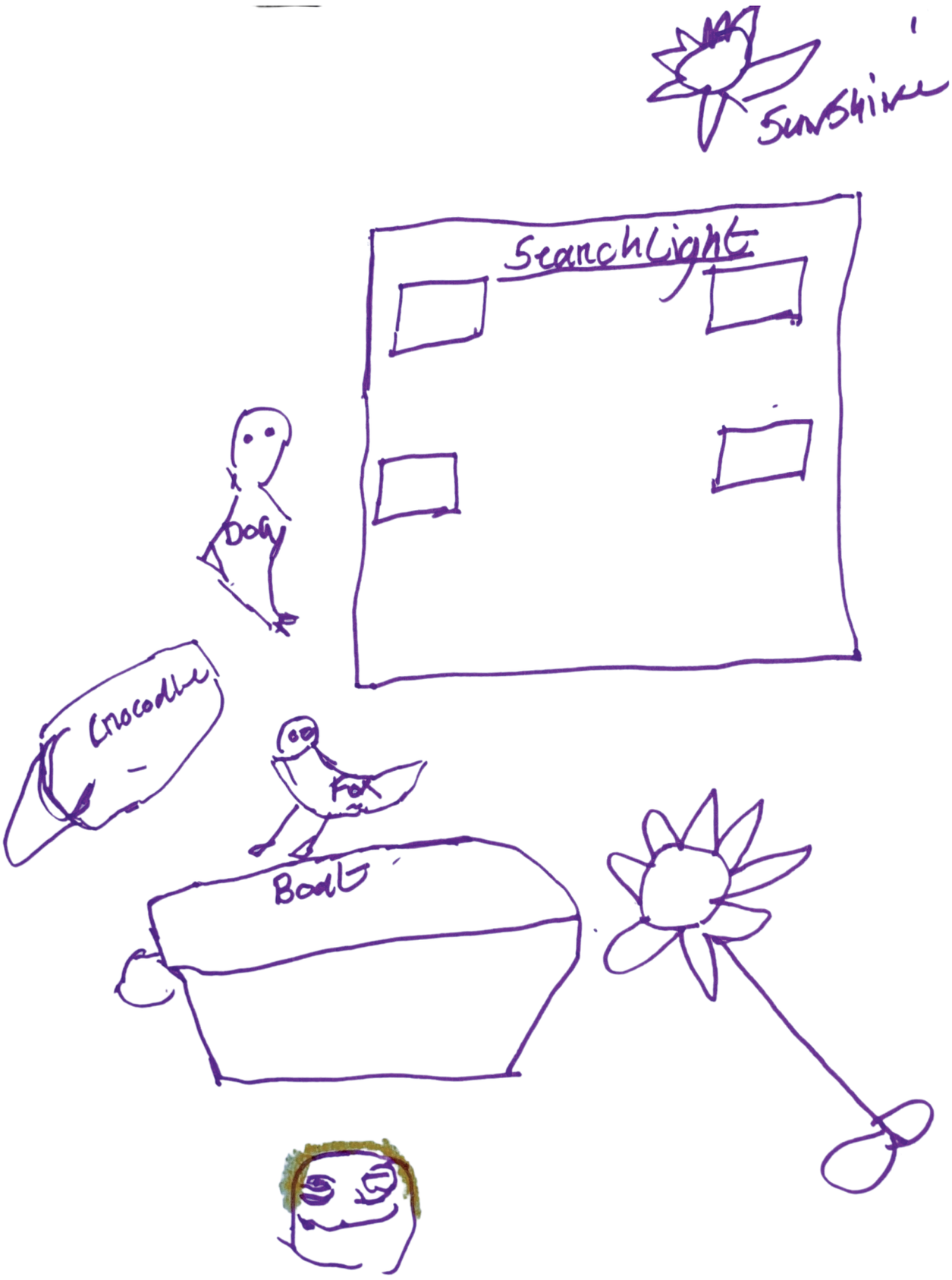
Wedding

Paul



Michael

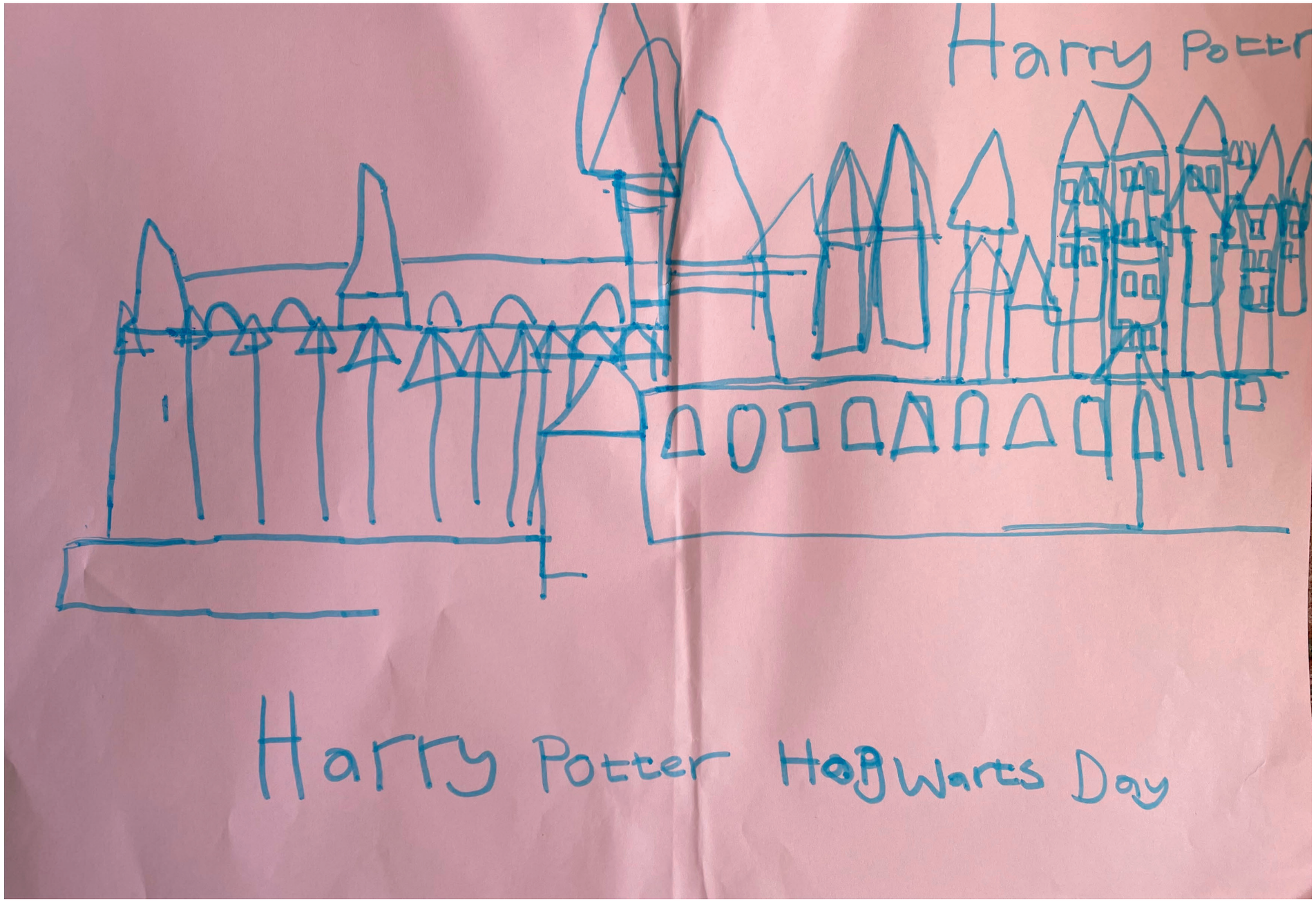
Rosie


Sunshine
Searchlight
Dog
Crocodile
Fox
Boat

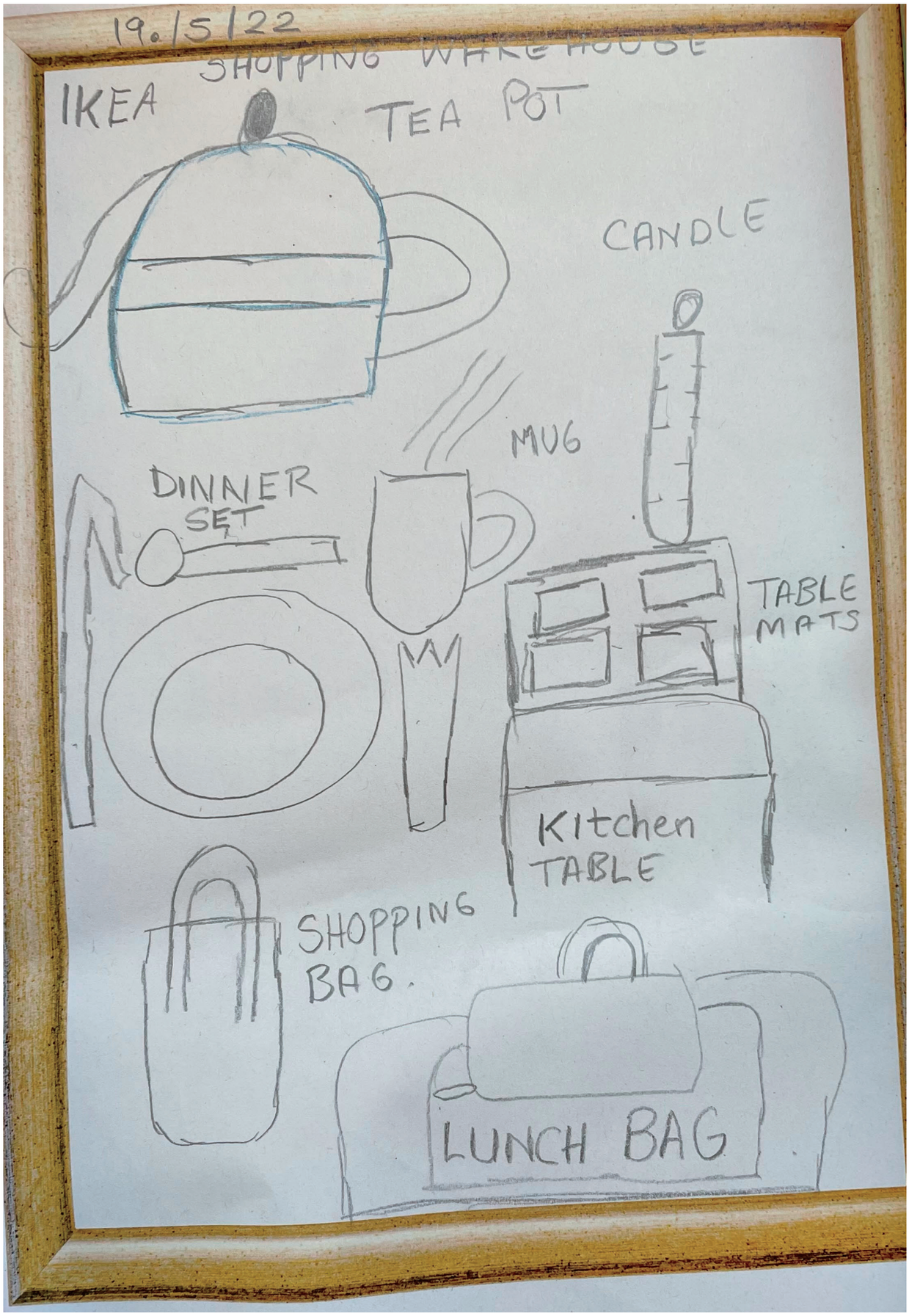
Rebecca

Rebecca

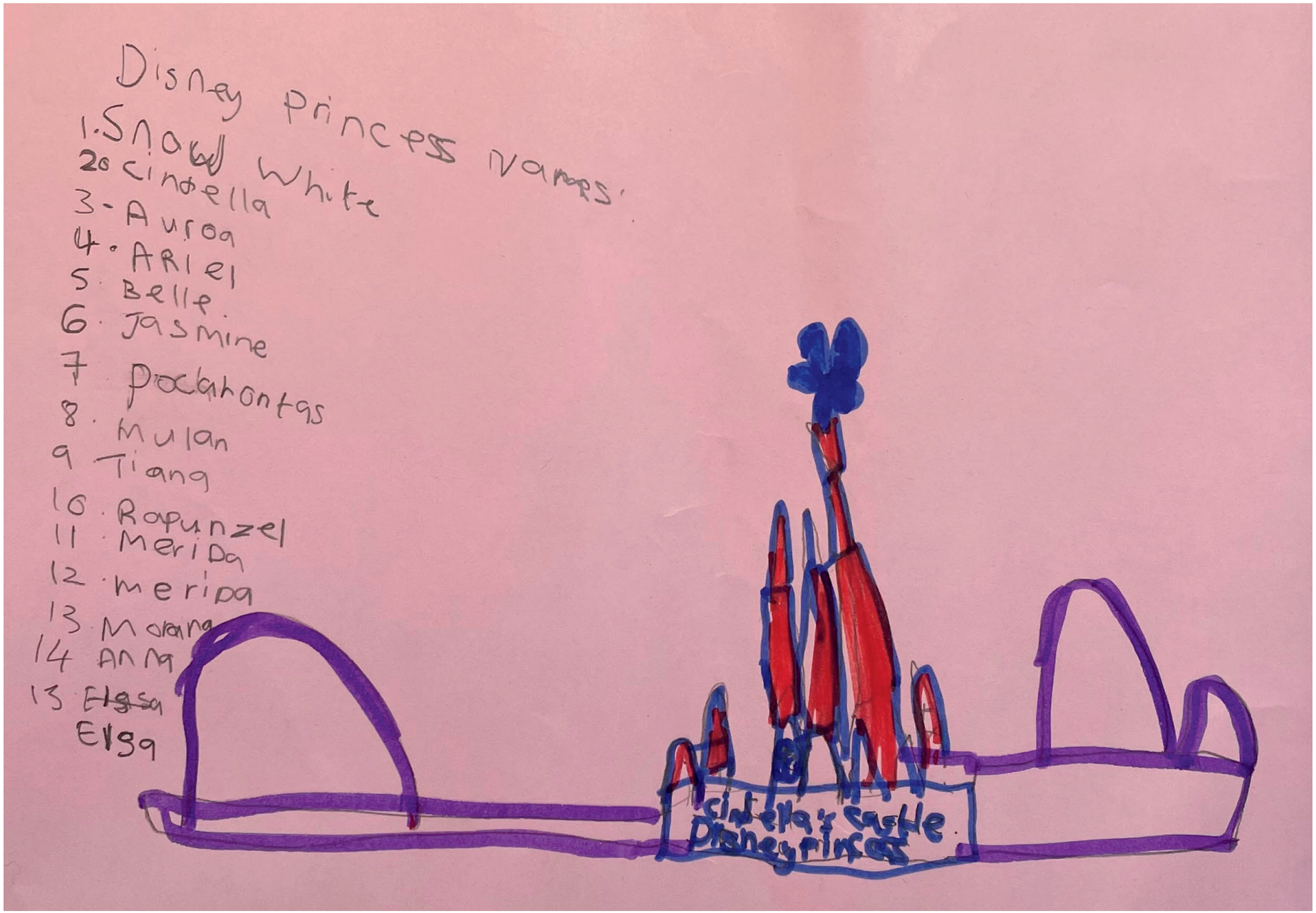
Paul



Leyla


19.5.22
IKEA
SHOPPING WAREHOUSE
TEA POT
CANDLE
MUG
DINNER SET
TABLE MATS
Kitchen TABLE
SHOPPING BAG.
LUNCH BAG

Carmen


Disney princess names:
1. Snow White
2. Cindella
3. Auroa
4. ARIel
5. Belle
6. Jasmine
7. Pocahontas
8. Mulan
9 Tiang
10. Rapunzel
11 MeriDa
12. meripa
13 Moana
14 ANNA
13 Elgsa
Elsa
Cindella's Castle
Disney princess

Karen

Now it's over to you!

Here are some blank pages for you to do your own drawings

What are you going to draw? Did you get some ideas from this book?

Now your drawing can be part of this book too!!!!

Name:

Name:

Name:

Thank you for reading this book
and doing some drawings

With many thanks to
everyone who helped us
to make this book:

Vince and Nicola
and
Paul, Michael, Katie, Leyla, Carmen,
Max, Rosie, Rebecca, Karen, Jack

This book is part of a project called 'Asset Based Storytelling in Kingston'. It was run by Kingston Libraries, Kingston University and storyteller Richard Neville between 2021 and 2022

LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

What The Hell are We Going to Call This?
or
He Who Dares, Writes

Poems, stories and thoughts from the Joel Project

This book is a record of the life giving power of community and friendship at the Joel Centre.

It contains the poetry, stories, memories and thoughts of the whole community at Joel. We created it during regular sessions of writing and conversation between February and May 2022.

This book is not just a record of those sessions but also a record of Joel itself, which is closing in June 2022.

Introduction

We have to look after each other, we are one human race that's it.

I have no interest in it, all this stuff in the news, if you want to do that with your life, that's your decision. We have to look after each other. People fighting each other who share borders…we shouldn't be fighting we should be protecting each other.

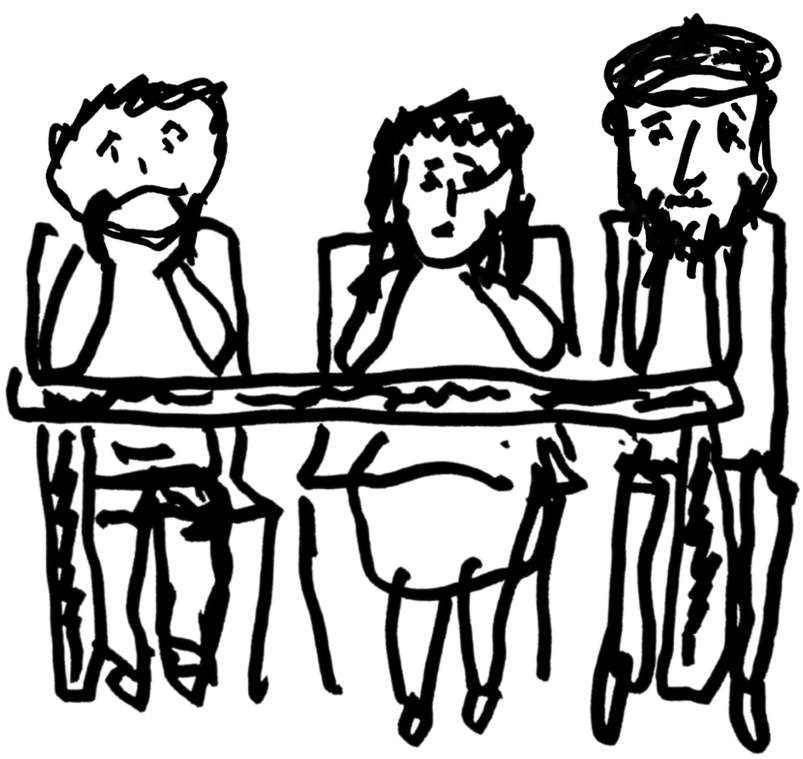
Steve

Here at Joel we will always leave the light on

On my first day here as service manager I was driving to work and a song came on the radio. It was Leave A Light On by Tom Walker. He wrote it for a friend who he doesn't want to lose to drugs. The chorus is 'I will always leave a light on'. It became the tagline for the whole of the project

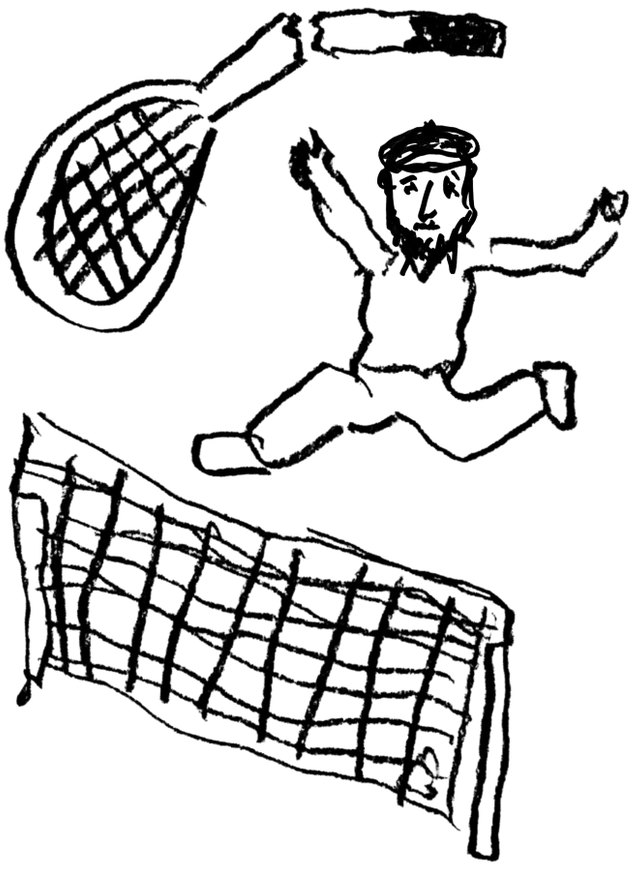
Part 1
Conversations

At Joel whatever we do, we talk together. There have been some wild rambling beautiful poetic sad funny conversations at Joel.



Joel Conversations
Number 1

The coup of the caper of the angle of the racket



I've never heard that before, what does it mean?

You want to know what it means? The caper is life in all its wonder and beauty. The coup is what happens when you live it knowing what life contains. The angle of the racket is when you get it right, when you really live in the middle of the wonder of life. That is what it means

Joel Conversations
Number 2

You are actually more annoying than annoying was when he was annoying

"That's what you say when they won't stop reminding me of things I didn't actually say. Like when they think I used to like East 17. East 17! I've never liked East 17. It's quite painful, I've got a rep you know? They're telling me I've got the hat and everything, but I actually I feel tarnished. I just want to say for the record that I have never liked East 17"

Joel Conversations
Number 3

We should have done a pantomime at Christmas.

You'd be a good villain

No I wouldn't, I wasn't even a good villain in real life

I've been unlucky with my trials. Been found guilty twice. Mind you, I was actually guilty both times, so I suppose I can't complain. It was only shop lifting, a pair of jeans.

Joel Conversations
Number 4

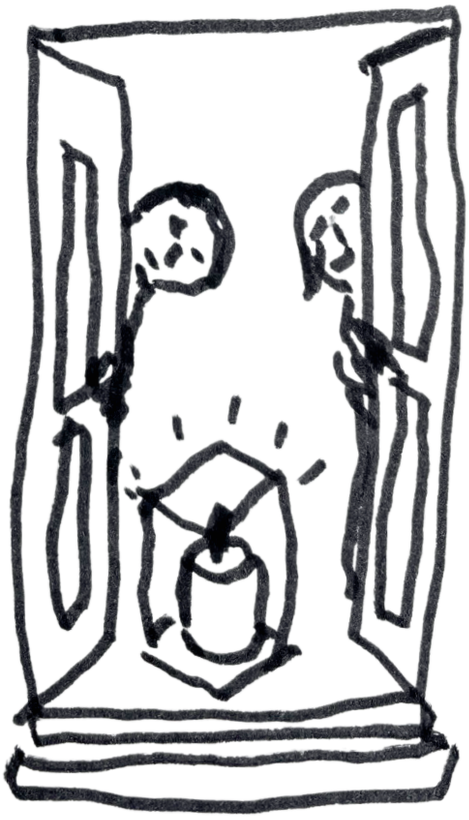
Age is unavoidable. It creeps up on you. Can't get away from it.

Ten years in prison
Twenty years travelling
And I'm here
It's a really wonderful feeling
To be around people that I care about
And hopefully they care about me
It's not one way traffic
On the other hand
You don't give to receive
Do you?

Joel Conversations
Number 5

The people in this place are my friends. that's a big thing to say, but they are my friends

There was a time
When I walked into the Joel
And then unbeknown to me
There was something I didn't know
And then I opened the door
Saw something that I hadn't seen before
And that happened to be a new life



The Pirate

A number of people
Over the years
Have called me a pirate
Captain Morgan
Captain Jack Sparrow
And now I look like one

COMMANDER

Part 2
Memories

Like members of a family, the Joel community shares memories of small moments together. In remembering these moments, it is not the content of the memory that counts, but the fact that we all share it. This is what makes these small memories so valuable. If you remember them with us, it means you were there. It means you belong.

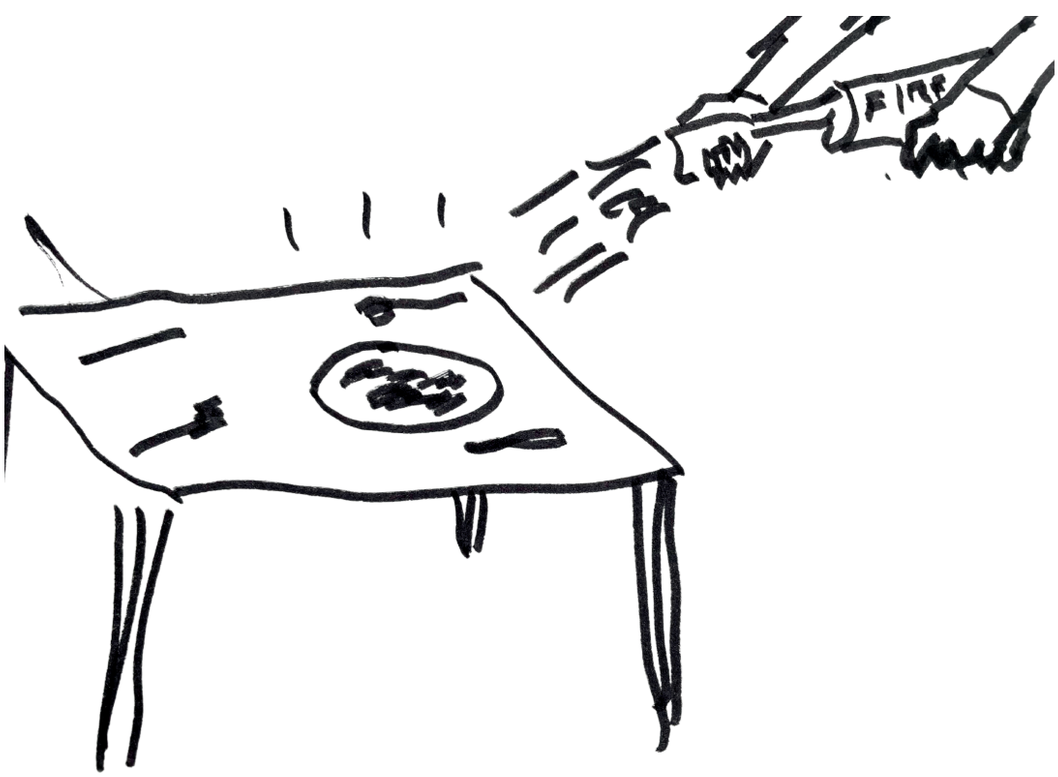
"When I look back on this last year, their have been some brilliant memories"

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 1

There was some music at the weekend. I brought them some of my music from Ghana. And they were all up having a boogie.

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 2

He kept telling us that on his travels he always ate the food that the locals ate. He kept telling us it would blow your head off. Then we ordered a Thai curry and he started complaining it was too hot for him!

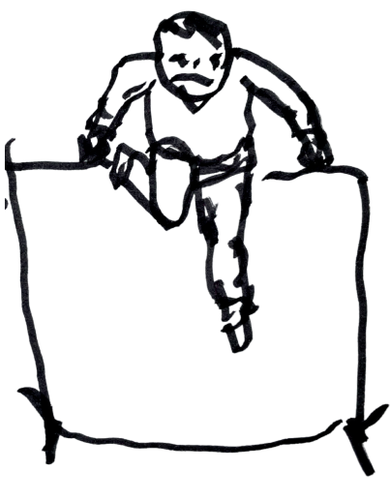


Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 3

Christmas was a special time here. We decorated a tree. It was heavily laden, tinsel, random church decorations. It looked like Christmas threw up in here. On Christmas Eve we sat down and watched Elf. Then the Christmas meal: starter, main, desert, apple pie...it all just disappeared

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 4

I broke my ankle and had to wear a cast. On the day I took the cast off I fell over a fence. I was glad no one saw it. They wouldn't have let me forget it.



Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 5

I cooked them a Thai curry. I cooked for everyone. I had to go to an AA meeting. So I did a Frank Bough to the meeting. Came back. They'd eaten the lot. They left me a portion fit for a small cat.

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 6

Ben snuck up behind me once and let off a party popper. It scared the life out of me. He'd found it randomly in the building. I think Scott had put them there months ago.

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 7

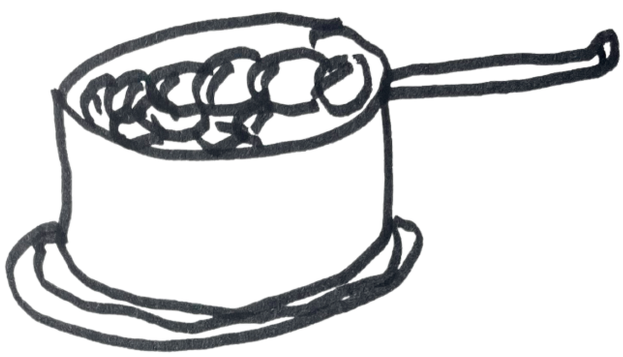
One Christmas we got dressed up and went next door. All of us. We were in elf costumes, santa costumes, giving it the large. That day we were a force to be reckoned with. It was us as a community in this building. We enjoyed ourselves and we had a laugh

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 8

It was my birthday recently. We all went out to a restaurant. And they were singing happy birthday to me. And that one there - him - he got down on one knee to sing me happy birthday. I nearly died from embarrassment. I thought 'what's he going to do?'

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 9

You remember Marcin? He used to be a chef. I remember we got a donation of tomatoes. There were loads of them. We chopped them up and tried to cook them but they came out all runny. Then Marcin came along and rescued it. You remember him? He used to live in the YMCA.



Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 10

The vicar came round to visit us from next door. Ben made him tea, you know all about his tea collection? And there he was saying 'more tea vicar?' It wasn't what the vicar was expecting. He didn't know what to say.

Short but sweet
Memories of Joel number 11

Marcin was in the kitchen and he played a trick on us. He threw some pepper into the air, then he went to hide. We came into the kitchen and everyone started sneezing. Then we saw some legs sticking out from behind the sofa. Then we heard him laughing. He was laughing so hard I thought he'd end up hurting himself.

My Dream

I'll have a tea shop. You've got all coffee shops now but I'd love to open a tea shop like they used to be. There would be tea in glass jars, there'd be a scoop, a little shovel to measure out the tea. I'd love to find a shop like that again.

Advanced diffusion techniques

We had a meditation group, staff and residents together. That day we were expecting a visit from one of the former residents, who had been asked to leave. He was coming back for his belongings and he was probably going to cause trouble.

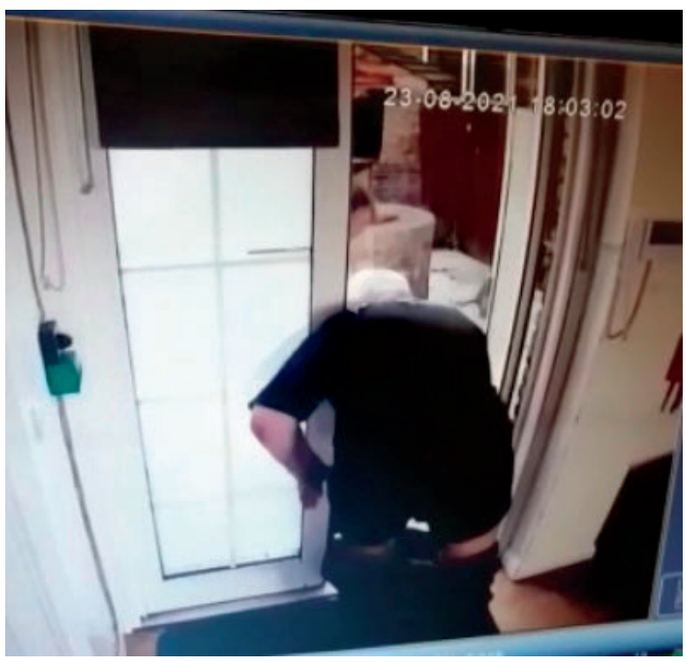
We were doing the meditation and there was a knock on the door. Paul got up to answer it.

We knew who it was.

Paul had undone the waist button of his trousers to get comfortable for the meditation. He jumped up, picked up the bag of belongings and opened the door. Just as that moment his trousers fell down.

The ex resident was standing there outside and there was Paul dropping his trousers and they looked at each other, he thrust the bag into his hand, and he shut the door. It happened in a moment. Then he went back to the meditation.

It was all captured on CCTV.



Life Saver

I was the first person here. For a long time I lived here on my own. I was the person who cut the ribbon when this place opened. There were no groups, no conversations, I really was alone here. Then Lisa came. I knew her, hadn't seen her for years. But she used to know my wife, god rest her soul. They were like sisters. You know what women are like when they drink together? Well, I remembered her drinking with my wife years ago. So when I saw her, it was like she saved my life.

My Name

My surname is Mortiboy. So it's obvious they used to call me 'naughty boy'. It's an old name, it means dead wood - my ancestors were probably wood cutters.

I was with a friend once, who was called Goodchild. We were stopped by a copper, who asked us our names. I told him mine and he got angry he said 'dont mess around, it's been a long night. What's your name?' So I told him again and he thought I said naughty boy again. Then he turned to my friend and asked him his name. So he told him, 'Goodchild'. Good Child and Naughty Boy. That copper was not a happy man after that.

Part 3
Creative Writing

Poetry and creative writing is a habit that runs very deep in our community. It has enabled many of our members to step back from their feelings and experiences to find a space for reflection and reconciliation. It has been immensely valuable for our members to find a community which supports these creative efforts. On the next few pages you can read some examples of the stories and poems written by our members.

Sometimes I get angry and then start drinking.
Now if I'm angry I try to write a poem
Steve

I wrote this poem in 2015 and I found it today. It's incredible, this piece of paper has survived for seven years. You cannot imagine the importance of poetry if you are in prison. I used to read a magazine of prison poetry called Inside Out and when I read those poems I realised I wasn't alone, we all felt the same thing. That was so powerful to me.

Blue Poem
2015

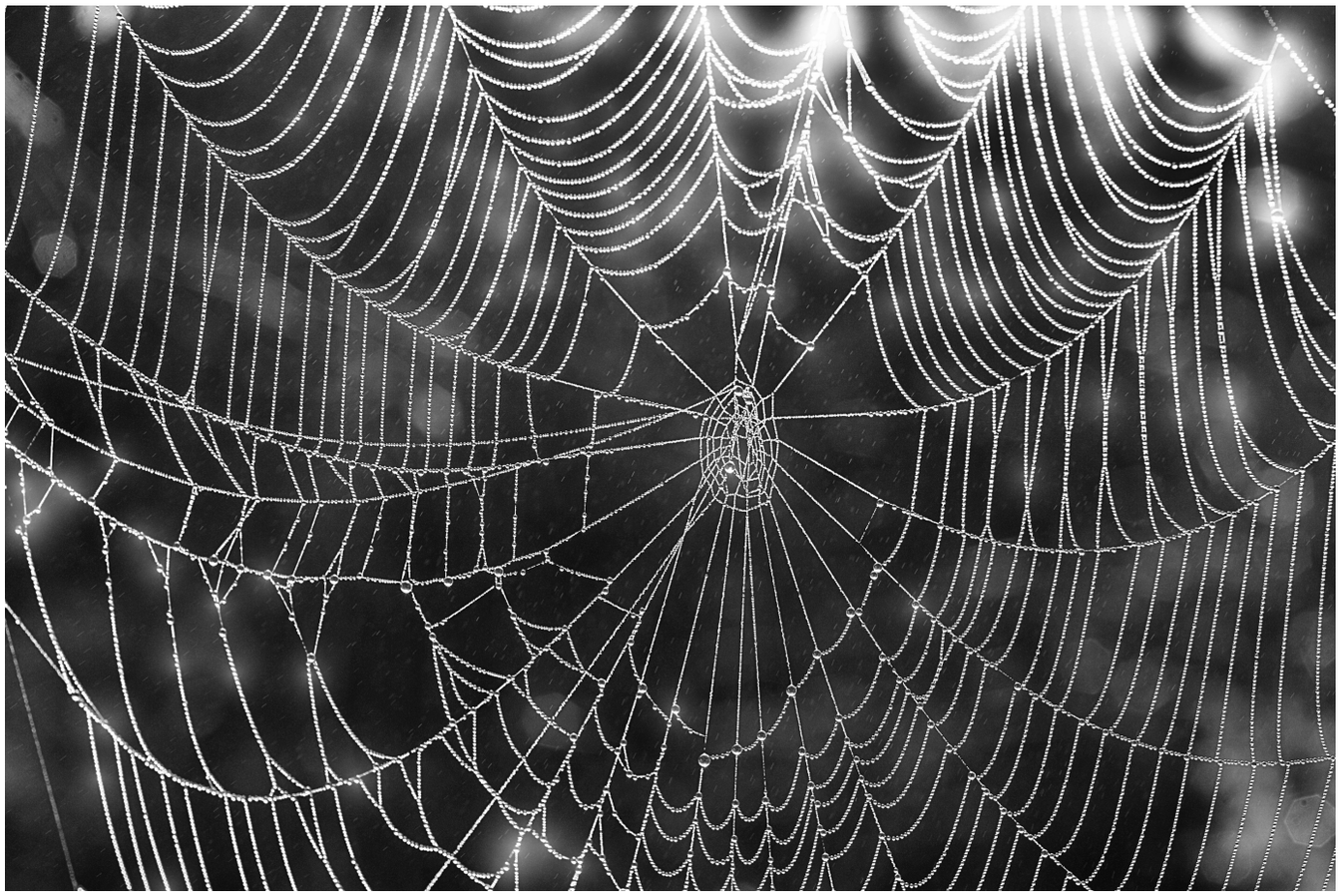
The stories in this prison
Most of them true
Have the haunting effect
Of making you blue
From the rattling of keys
To the endless dreams
We keep praying 'please, please, please'
Was it the drugs or even the drink
If only I could remember, think, think, think
Prison is no place to serve out your time
I just wish this life was mine

Steve

One line at a time

Write a line or two, about each photo. Don't worry where this is going, just respond to what's in front of you

"I look at the photo, then a take a minute to think about it, collect my thoughts, I don't have to rush in immediately. Then I start to write"
Ben



It will be a long time before I kick the bucket
Now I think before I cast a web of lies
Half full half empty?
Atom heart mother
Look at the beautiful moon
The finger of accusation is pointed right at me
Ben

Wagon wheels
Incey wincey spider
Oh to be a pail!
Look ok? I've heard it all before
What a beautiful way to light up a tree
I hope you realise you're pointing three fingers back at yourself
Steve

The Journey

Imagine a walk through the countryside...where would you go? What would you see?

Use the photos on the next few pages to write a journey, to write yourself into the journey

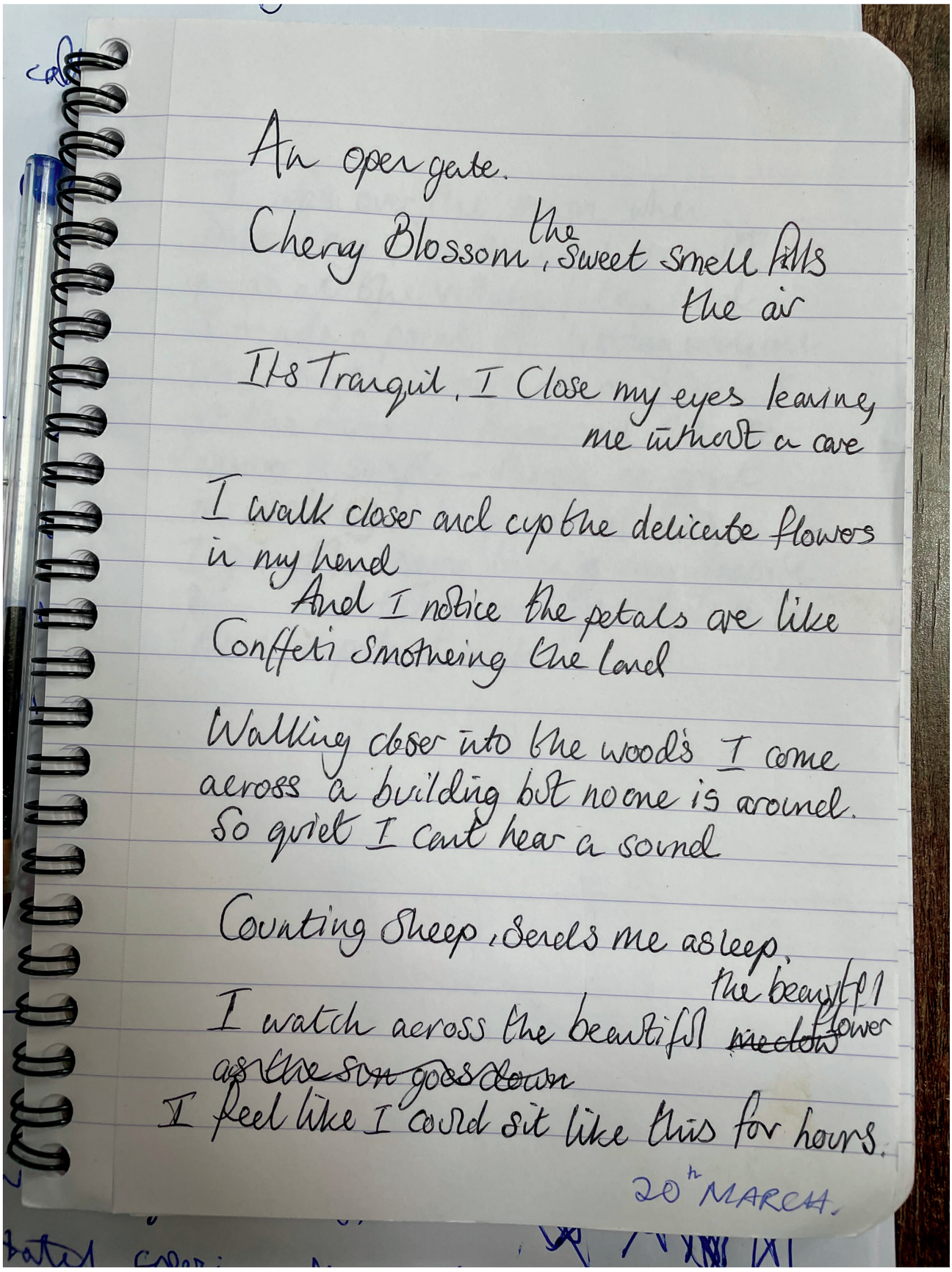
An open gate
Cherry blossom, the sweet smell fills
the air
It’s tranquil, I close my eyes, leaving
me without a care
I walk closer and cup the delicate flowers
in my hand
And I notice the petals are like
Confetti smothering the land

Walking closer into the woods I come
across a building but no one is around
So quiet I can’t hear a sound

Counting sheep sends me to sleep

I watch across the beautiful flowers
I feel like I could sit like this for hours

Ben



An open gate.
Cherry Blossom, the sweet smell fills the air

Its Tranquil. I close my eyes leaving me without a care

I walk closer and cup the delicate flowers in my hand
And I notice the petals are like Confetti Smothering the land

Walking closer into the woods I come across a building but no one is around.
So quiet I can't hear a sound

Counting Sheep, Sends me asleep,
I watch across the beautiful ~~meadow~~ flower the beautiful
~~as the sun goes down~~
I feel like I could sit like this for hours.

20th MARCH.

Stories...

Look at these paintings and use them to write a story. They show several different places, can you introduce each place into your story?
Who is living there, how do they fit into the story, who or what is the story about?

C. Pissarro 97

The crew of the ship were absolutely terrified. The captain of the ship wished he had listened to his wife. On the day before they set sail, they had walked among the snow covered land and expressed their undying love for each other.

The captain had shut his eyes for a split second so that this awful storm would be nothing but a memory. When he opened his eyes everything was worse and he imagined a life without his wife.

After the captain had beaten the worst storm in his lifetime he had received a telegram informing him he was to receive an honorary medal for bravery. He had to go to central London to receive it. He had never ever seen so many people.

Ben

Part 4
The Ending

The Joel project will close in June because of lack of funding

Here are some final thoughts from those who live or work at Joel

Joel has done a lot for me
Without you, I'd be sleeping on the street
I wouldn't be alive
You kept me safe

Alba puts up with us lot. She's beautiful inside and out. She is the best cook. We made this mosaic with her when a mosaic artist visited us every Thursday. Each part of this mosaic expresses different hopes and commemorates different people. Every section has a story to tell. There is a sun, a broken heart, a tree, a rainbow heart and many other personal stories contained in this work. It speaks about us.

It's Closing?

“Wow. What the...??
Where did that come from?”, I wondered
For days, I moped, then hoped and then again, moped
For those days, they were days I struggled to cope
But then I began to understand
We have way more pressing matters at hand
From this time on, it isn’t just about me
(Although there is an element of that to keep)
We can unite, grow and keep calm
And we can continue to provide humour to our own little funny farm
Us, eventually pleasantly, will always have Joel inside of us
And every now and again, at a random time, something will remind us
We are loved, determined and continue to fight on
Because, regardless of the future, here at Joel, we will always leave the light on

Scott Piggott
Night Support Worker

Group poems made by adding one word at a time

Today I went down the sideroad
then became injured by a horse
that really hurt
peril within my arse

Apparently Liverpool couldn't lost
Hackney London's first ever football team
West Ham denied irons obviously
They denial approached
Scruffly badly lost
What the hell could happen to ones self if you happen

When I turned twenty I never thought I would see thirty. Then when I got to thirty I never thought I would live to be forty. On my fortieth birthday I thought that I would never live to see fifty.
And now my fiftieth birthday is in two days time...

Steve

I've been an alchoholic since I've been at school, right. But this place, this is the first place I've ever lived where I've been clean from drugs.

Ben

Don’t Give Up

Judgments are a confession of character.

Opinions don’t define your reality.

Everyone’s journey is different.

Lovely and caring people we meet in our journey.

The past cannot be changed.

Things always get better with time

Overthinking will lead to sadness.

Happiness is found within.

Positive thoughts create positive things.

Smiles are contagious, and kindness is free.

Never give up before the miracle happens.

One day you will thank yourself, for never giving up.

You only fail if you quit.

Dear Addiction,

For many years I have let you live rent free in my head.
I have partied with you, with pills and booze and passed out as if dead.
When circumstances made me limp, you swooped in like a crutch,
Like comfort to a baby, I trusted you so much.
Everytime I called you comforted with a counterfeit of needs,
The emotions I'm not handling, you gave me space to breathe.
The snooze button on the alarm of life, to tap-out , numb delay
The pleasure flees, the shame then breeds as my mind hits the replay.
You started out as Tenant, how did you end up as landlord?
You were temporarily sofa surfing, now I'm sleeping on the floor.
Locked out of this life I owned and now you've changed the locks.
I wonder the streets, with hand-outs to eat, this has got to stop.
In this harsh reality I know I'm not alone,
Others like me evicted by addiction are longing to go home.
Home not being any place- but peace within myself.
To eat and sleep and wear fresh clothes, to admit that I need help
To take the hand of thee unknown and journey back to self.
I've lied to those I have loved the most and burnt the bridge of trust,
The power of your seduction, your never ending lust.
For I laid down my life for you, in surrendered sacrifice,
I did things I thought I would never do, your price has been my life.
Now there's nothing left to lose and nothing left to give,
The power now is what I choose and I decide to live.
I know you are not what I am but what I have become,
By the path and power of my own hands, then you can be undone.

Your Friend, Addict.

Finally...

The Joel Playlist

Music is an important part of life at Joel. Each piece of music in this playlist will be forever connected to the person who introduced it, or the stories that lie behind it. The Joel playlist will always bring back the most powerful memories of living or working at Joel. Enjoy it and think about us when you listen to it.

Tom Walker - Leave A Light On

Radical Dance Faction - Free State

East 17 - It's Alright

Adam and the Ants - Prince Charming

Stone Roses

Gat Decor vs. Degrees of Motion - Degrees of Passion

Beck - Hell Yes

White Stripes - Icky Thump

Gorillaz

Culture Shock

Citizen Fish - Manmade

Pink Floyd - Wish You Were Here

Ozric Tentacles

A brew
will
see you
through

With very many thanks to everyone
who supported our creative work at
the Joel Centre

Lisa Smith
Ben Mortiboy
Steve Millington
Simon
Kat
Amy
Alba
Rachel
Scott Piggott
Angela
Paul
Chloe

The book was created during sessions led by storyteller Richard Neville who also compiled the book

The project was supported by Kingston Libraries and Kingston University

About Joel

The Joel Centre was a safe supportive community for a small number of people seeking to break away from chaotic lifestyles brought about by rough sleeping and addiction.

Joel took a resource based approach, helping each individual to set and reach their own goals on their journey to recovery.

Everyone took part in day-to-day chores, daily group activities, shared meals and 1-1 support from dedicated staff. It was the first project of its kind in London.

The Joel Centre depended on a level of funding and donations that was not sustained during the pandemic. It was forced to close in June 2022.

KINGSTON CHURCHES action on homelessness

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Kingston University London

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Appendix 5

The Sky Has No Borders

Creative writing from members of
Refugee Action Kingston

This book contains work written by members of Refugee Action Kingston during creative writing workshops in the summer of 2022. We chatted, experimented with different styles of writing and explored different ideas and thoughts.

Most of all we created moments of happiness and well-being through playing with language and entering the world of the imagination.

The themes of peace, happiness and reconciliation all emerged in the writing that was created during our sessions. I hope you feel something of that peace and happiness as you read this book.

With very many thanks to the participants, who contributed their writing and thoughts so generously during our creative writing sessions.

Anton
Hamid
Natalia
Reimbay
Vitaly

The sessions were run and the book was produced by Richard Neville

Many thanks also to Jenny and Heike from Refugee Action Kingston for all their help in making the sessions so happy and productive

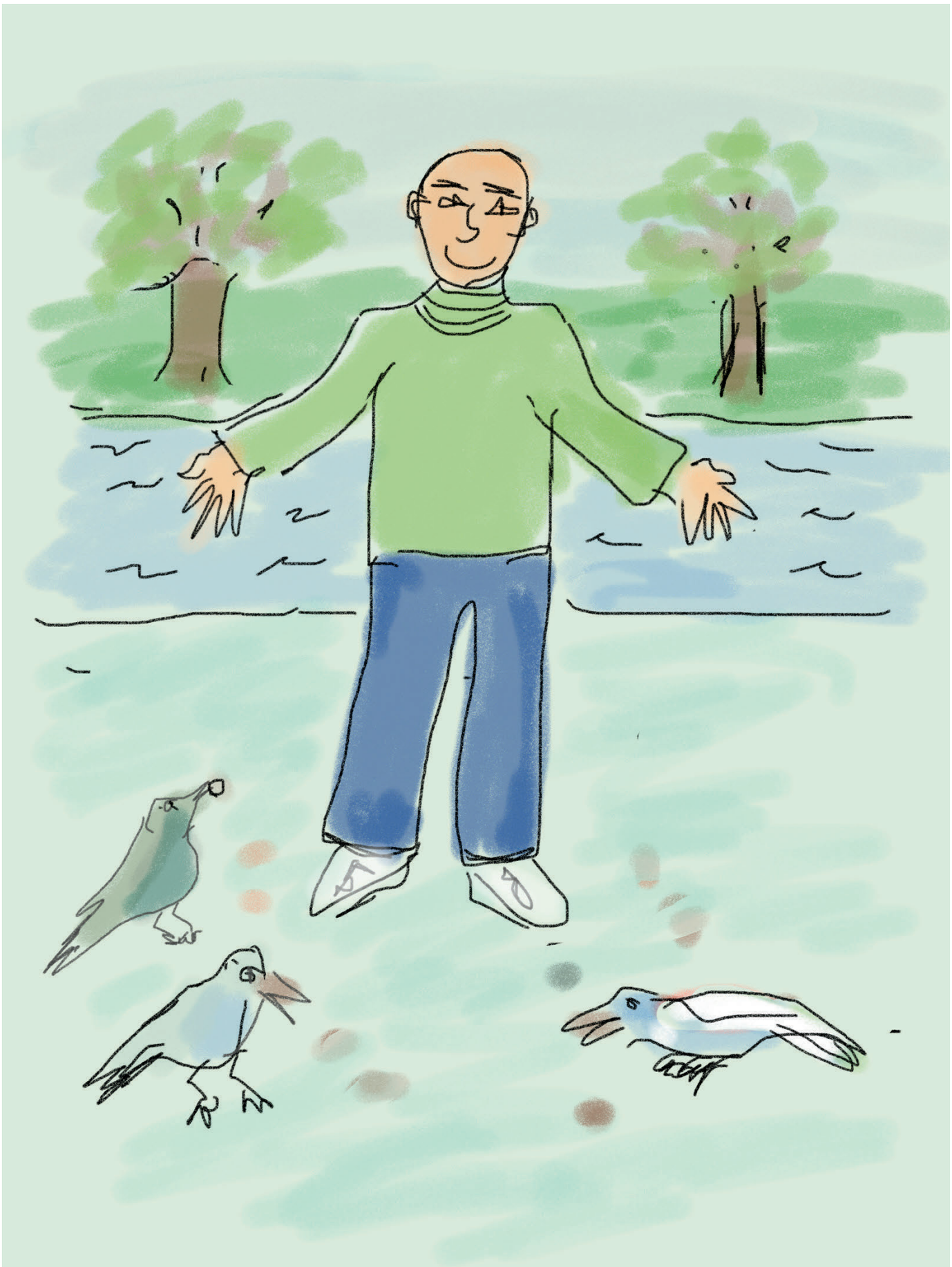
Finally, thanks to Kingston Libraries and Kingston University for their support and advice during the project

LOTTERY FUNDED
Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

REFUGEE ACTION KINGSTON

Kingston University London



Hi My Friend,

I'm Hamid and I'm writing about my life

I'm in the day time more than happy because:
Living in UK I have to go to school, and I have passed Introduction 1,2,3 and now I want to go Level 1 in Entry Level
I have two dumb-bells in my room and sometimes I have to practice with my dumb-bells
I have learn English with laptop, phone and reading - writing - watching - and listening to radio
I'm happy because I have plan about future
Sometimes I go to river and I feed bread to birds because I love that
and I have happy about everything

Hi my frieand - I'm Hamid And my katin
ebuot my dayse
I tollking ebuot my live -
I'm in the day moure than time Happy Becues -
i living in uk i have to go to sckol And i have pas
pritry 1-2-3 And than I wel go to level 1 in Enitry 1
i have two dambels in my room and sometimes -
i have to practic with my dambels - I have Learen
English with Labtob and phon And Reading -
kithing - waching - And Leasining to radyo -
im Happy Becuse i have plan ebuot fiucher.
sometimes I going in kivertimes I feed bread to
berds Becues I love thot And I have to Happy -
ebuot every thing.

ebuet joun
joined up

The Beauty of Summer

I like summer. It is beautiful time
Weather always nice and warmer. I wake up in the morning to the chirping of birds. Green trees outside the window and the leaves rustle pleasantly. Flowers bloom and nice smell. Wind blows, gently sway leaves. Sometimes it feels like heaven on earth.

A fence may limit a piece of land but the sky helps expand boundaries and dreams.
I love being in the garden in summer and thinking about life.

June is beautiful month

I like summer. It is beautiful time. Weather always nice and warmer. I wake up in the morning to the chirpery of birds. Green trees outside the window and the leaves rustle pleasantly. Flowers bloom and nice smell. Wind blows gently sway leaves.

Sometimes it feels like heaven on earth. A fence may limit a piece of land, but the sky helps expand ~~boundaries~~ borders and dreams.

I love being in the garden in summer and thinking about life.

Vitaly

14.06.2022

What happened to modern English poetry?

As a passionate fan of the poetic word, I have been trying to read some of the recent poems, written by contemporary poets. None of them sounds even remotely like, for example ,Lewis Caroll's immortal:

The time has come
The walrus said
To talk of many things
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
Of cabbages and kings
And why the sea is boiling hot
And whether pigs have wings

In contrast, in modern poetry, I can find neither rhymes, nor rhythms, nor verbal melody. It is simply prose written in rows.

Smart people tell me that modern poetry should abolish the tyranny of rhymes, and despotism of rhythm. The same people also tell me that everyone has a right to be called a poet, if one wishes to - and that it is simply a matter of Freedom.

Well, if it all boils down to Freedom, then, I guess, I can do nothing but agree with the modern interpretation of poetry, with one clause: I have the Freedom not to read it!

Hospitable Cyclops

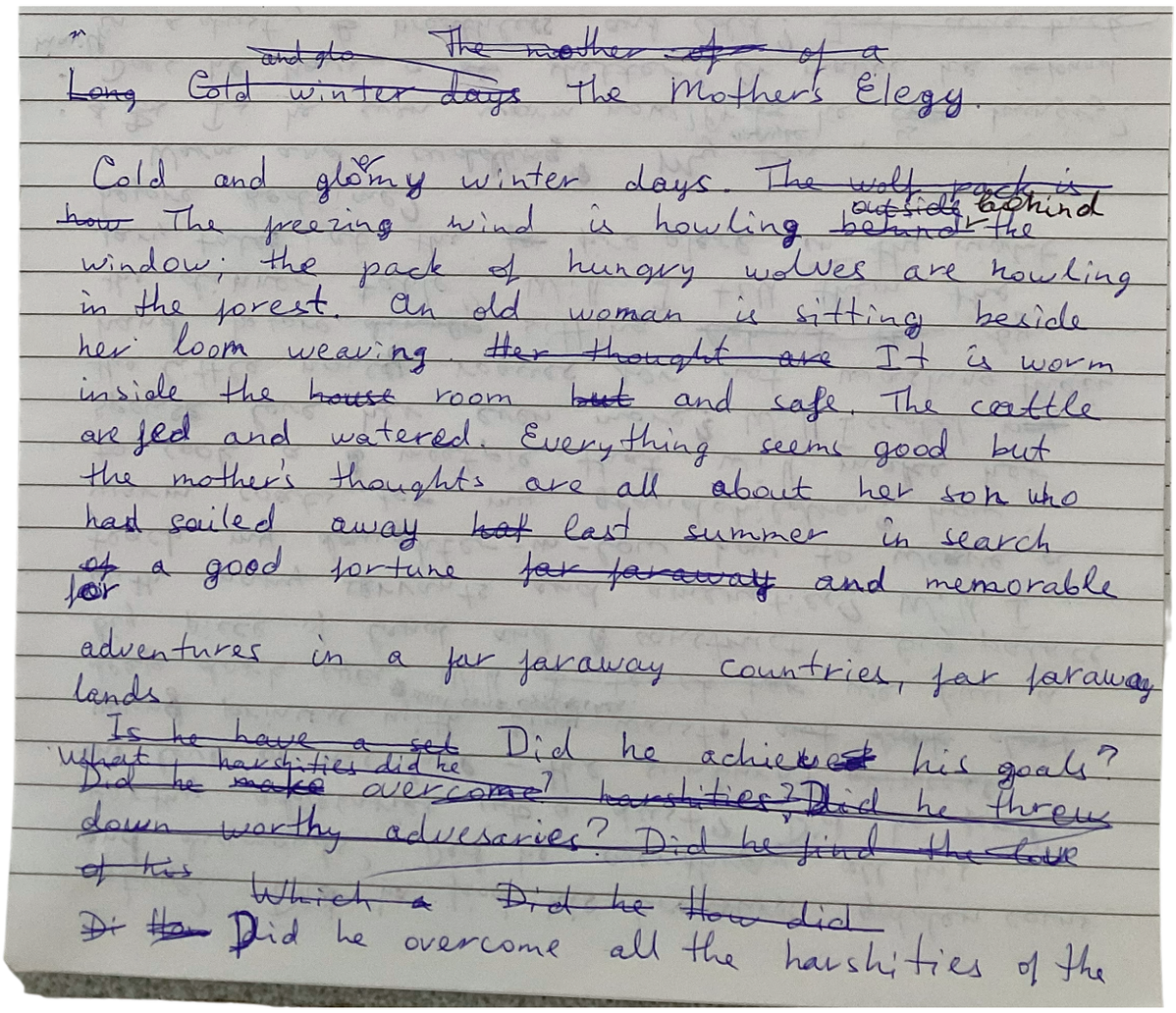
Once I travelled in the mountains on a long road. I saw a fabulous bird in front of the stairs that led to the sky. I climbed up among the clouds for a long time. Suddenly everything changed dramatically and before me appeared the boundless sea and the boat on the shore. I decided to go for a sea rowing trip, but the boat suddenly began to sail by itself. On a sudden, a dragon appeared from under the waters and asked me in human voice what I was doing in the kingdom of the cyclops.
I said that I came in peace and love to travel to fabulous places. I would be happy to meet a cyclops.
A voice from heaven said that the cyclops is glad to welcome me to his kingdom. I immediately entered the palace and had a pleasant conversation with the cyclops for a whole week. It was an amazing welcome and an unforgettable experience.

Thoughts at the Loom

Cold and gloomy winter days. The freezing wind is howling behind the window ; the pack of hungry wolves are howling in the forest. An old woman is sitting beside her loom weaving. It is warm inside the room and safe. The cattle are fed and watered. Everything seems good but the mother’s thoughts are all about her son who had sailed away last summer in search of a good fortune and memorable adventures in far far-away countries,far far-away lands.

Did he achieve his goals? Did he overcome all the harshities of the trip? Did he find his treasures: golden coins and diamonds? Did he overthrow all his worthy adversaries into the dust? Did he find the love of his life - the sunburnt young princess with tiny waist and deep dark eyes and long eyelashes?

Will we buy a big palace with many servants and amenities? Will I teach my daughter-in-law how to weave a warm coat for my grandchildren, how to cook a meat pie that will make her spouse love her even more? Will I scold the little noisy rogues for not washing their hands before sitting by the dinner table? Will I tell them the fairy tales at the fire place in the night before bedtime?



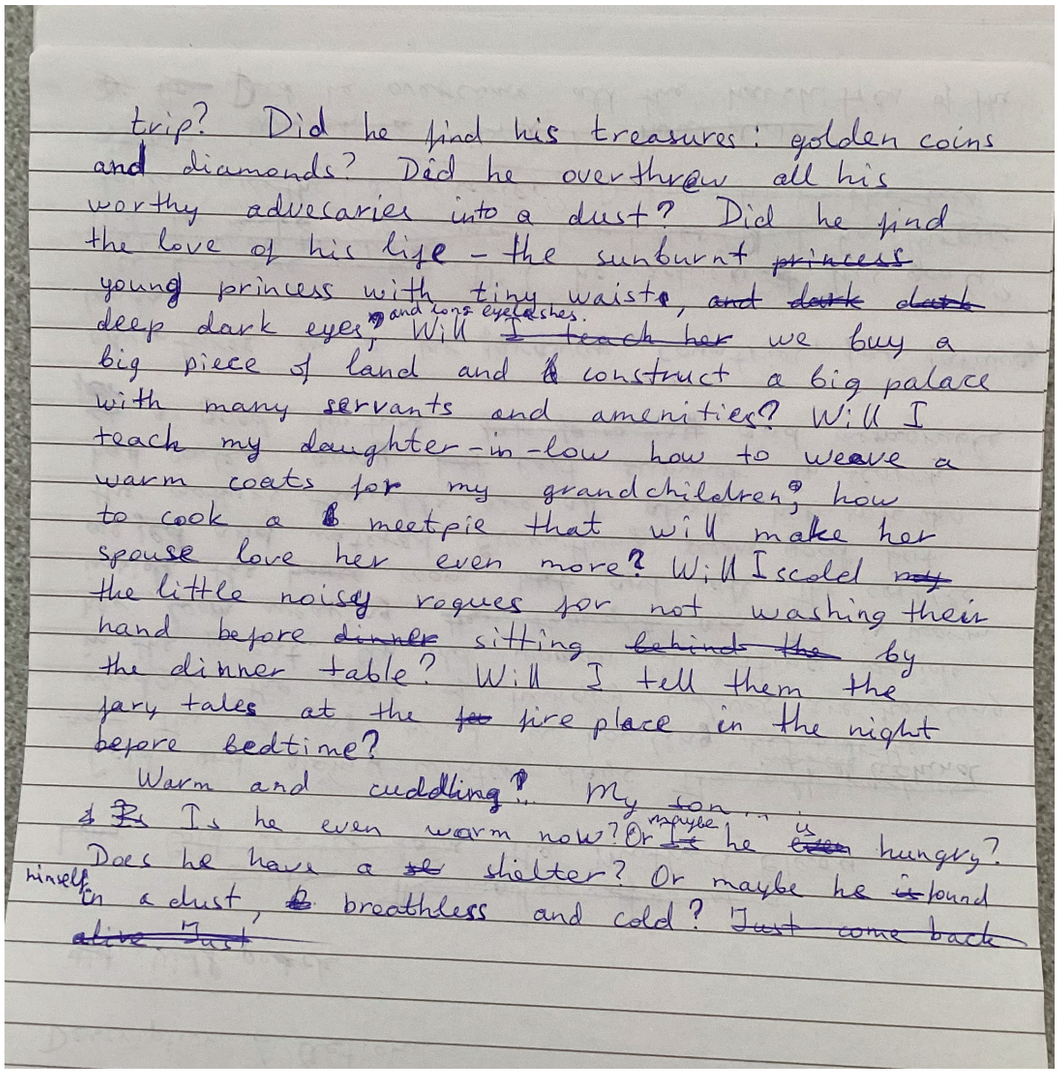
The Mother's Elegy.

Cold and gloomy winter days. The howling wind is howling behind the window; the pack of hungry wolves are howling in the forest. An old woman is sitting beside her loom weaving. It is warm inside the room and safe. The cattle are fed and watered. Everything seems good but the mother's thoughts are all about her son who had sailed away last summer in search of a good fortune and memorable adventures in a far faraway countries, far faraway lands.

Did he achieve his goals? Did he overcome all the harshities of the

My son...is he even warm now? Or maybe he is hungry? Does he have a shelter? Or maybe he found himself in the dust, breathless and cold....

Just come back alive!!!



trip? Did he find his treasures: golden coins and diamonds? Did he overthrow all his worthy adversaries into a dust? Did he find the love of his life - the sunburnt ~~princess~~ young princess with tiny waist, ~~and dark~~ ~~dark~~ deep dark eyes and long eyelashes. Will ~~I teach her~~ we buy a big piece of land and construct a big palace with many servants and amenities? Will I teach my daughter-in-law how to weave a warm coats for my grandchildren, how to cook a meatpie that will make her spouse love her even more? Will I scold ~~my~~ the little noisy rogues for not washing their hand before ~~dinner~~ sitting ~~behind the~~ by the dinner table? Will I tell them the fairy tales at the ~~fire~~ fireplace in the night before bedtime?

Warm and cuddling! My ~~son...~~ maybe ~~I~~ he ~~is~~ hungry? ~~I~~ he even warm now? Or ~~he~~ Does he have a ~~shelter~~ shelter? Or maybe he ~~is~~ found himself in a dust, breathless and cold? ~~Just come back alive. Just~~

If you love your enemy then you will know yourself

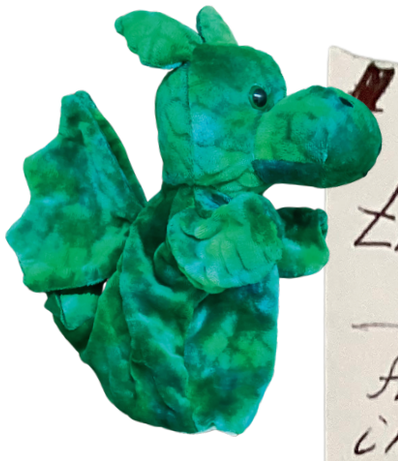
A dragon and a crocodile lived in the same kingdom and they were fierce enemies.

The dragon had a daughter and the crocodile had a son.

Daughter and son in love with each other, and begin to meet often, secretly.

The parents of the children found out about this and were upset, but then they saw the pure love of their children.

Children were able to change the inner world of their parents,
because the parents were able to recognise their mistakes and their attitudes towards their enemies and made them friends...
So....this story shows that...If you love you enemy then you will know yourself



If you love your enemy (*),
then you will know yourself.

Story.

A dragon and a crocodile lived in the same kingdom, and they were fierce enemies. The dragon had a daughter and the crocodile had a son. Daughter and son in love with each other and begun to meet often secretly. The parents of the children found out about this and were upset, but then they saw the pure love of their children. Children were able to change the inner world of their parents, because the parents were able to recognize their mistakes and changed their attitude towards their enemies and made them friends. (*)

Love and goodness always triumph over evil!

08.04.2022
Vitalii

Rhyming Poem
("this is the first poem I have ever written!!!")

When the flowers bloom and there is a breeze
I don’t feel like my emotions freeze

Feeling blue won’t give me a clue
But touching a leaf is such a relief

Climbing a tree
Makes me feel free

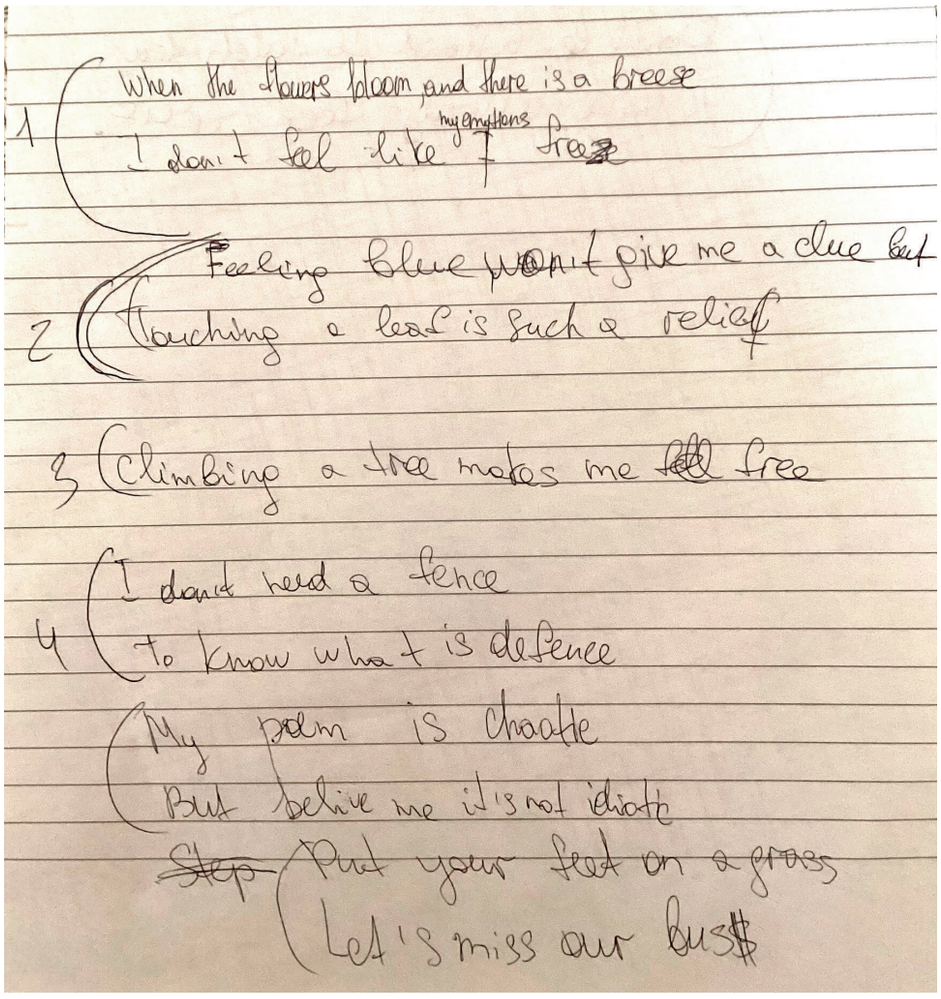
I don’t need a fence
To know what is defence

My poem is chaotic
But believe me, it is not idiotic

Put your feet on the grass
Let’s miss our bus

We live on planet earth
You should know it is time for rebirth

Don’t be afraid to touch the dew
It will always feel true


When the flowers bloom, and there is a breeze
I don't feel like my emotions I freeze

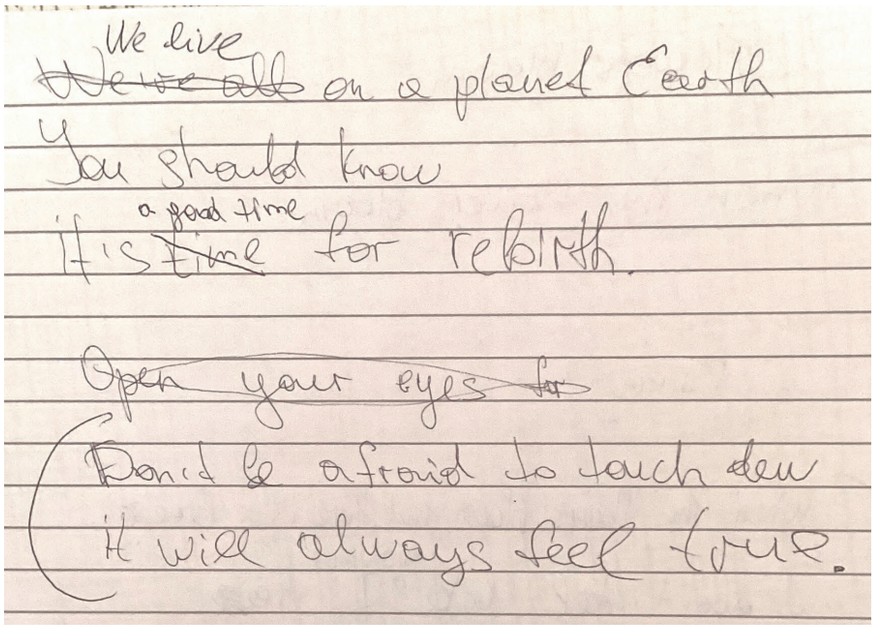
Feeling blue won't give me a clue but
touching a leaf is such a relief

Climbing a tree makes me ~~fell~~ free

I don't need a fence
to know what is defence

My palm is chaotic
But belive me it's not idiotic

~~Step~~ Put your feet on a grass
Let's miss our bus$


~~We've all~~ We live on a planet Earth
You should know
It's ~~time~~ a good time for rebirth.

~~Open your eyes for~~

Don't be afraid to touch dew
It will always feel true.

Happiness is a Game of Football

I played football again last Sunday. The team consisted of 10 players. My physical condition was in great shape. I was good dribbling and I hit the opponent's goal many times. I scored two goals and had a great head assist.
My goal from 10 metres with strong shot on goal turned out to be especially beautiful. Defenders and the goalkeeper did not even move. Our team won and I was happy that I helped us win!
I thank God that I can play football.

Some Text about Text

"I was always very interested in words and reading. I learned to read before I went to school. But before I could read I even loved the way the text looked. The Young Pioneers had a magazine, and I loved to look at the words laid out in columns.

I wanted to be a postman when I was a child, because I wanted to be able to hold all those texts and columns of print. I remember that I made some imitation magazines when I was very young. I could not read or write, but I scribbled on pieces of paper and made columns and blocks of text, and then I went around delivering it to people."

nb The Young Pioneers was a youth organisation in the Soviet Union similiar to the Scouts, Cubs and Guides in the UK.

Childhood

"We used to hear folk tales and fairy tales at school. We listened to them when I was in nursery school. Sometimes they were told using puppets and they were on TV as well.

When I was at summer camp one year, I was the king in a story.The story goes like this: there are seven brothers and they have a sister, and their mother dies, and then the father marries again and the step mother puts a spell on the brothers and turns them into geese. The sister has to spin a thread from a thorn bush, and then she sews shirts for her brothers. After seven years she puts the shirts on the geese and they turn back into her brothers, and the step mother...she goes away.

I remember those times and those stories. They were so happy. We played in a space surrounded by houses, where there was grass and lighting at night. We were playing all day long, playing football, until midnight sometimes, until it was dark, and no one was afraid, we were all safe."

Proverbs

If you love you enemy
Then he might become your frenemy

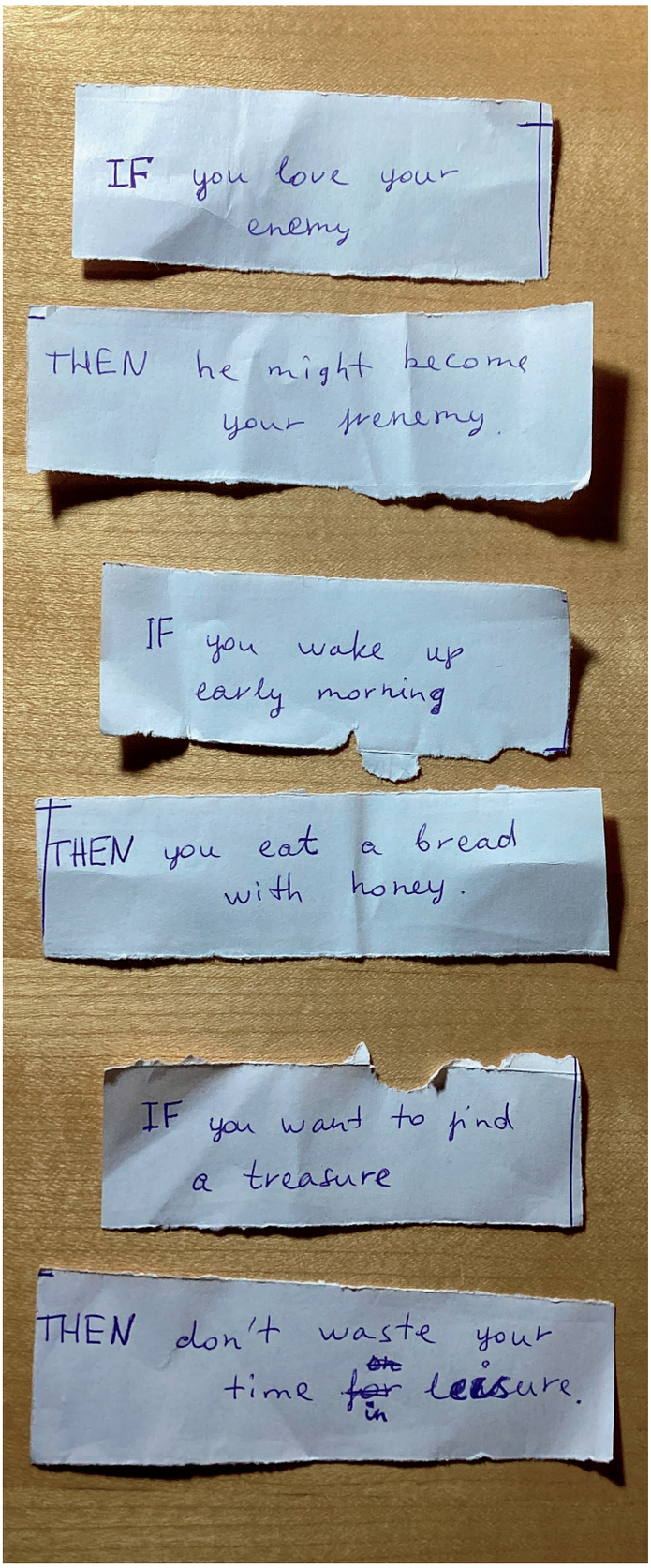
If you wake up early morning
Then you eat bread with honey

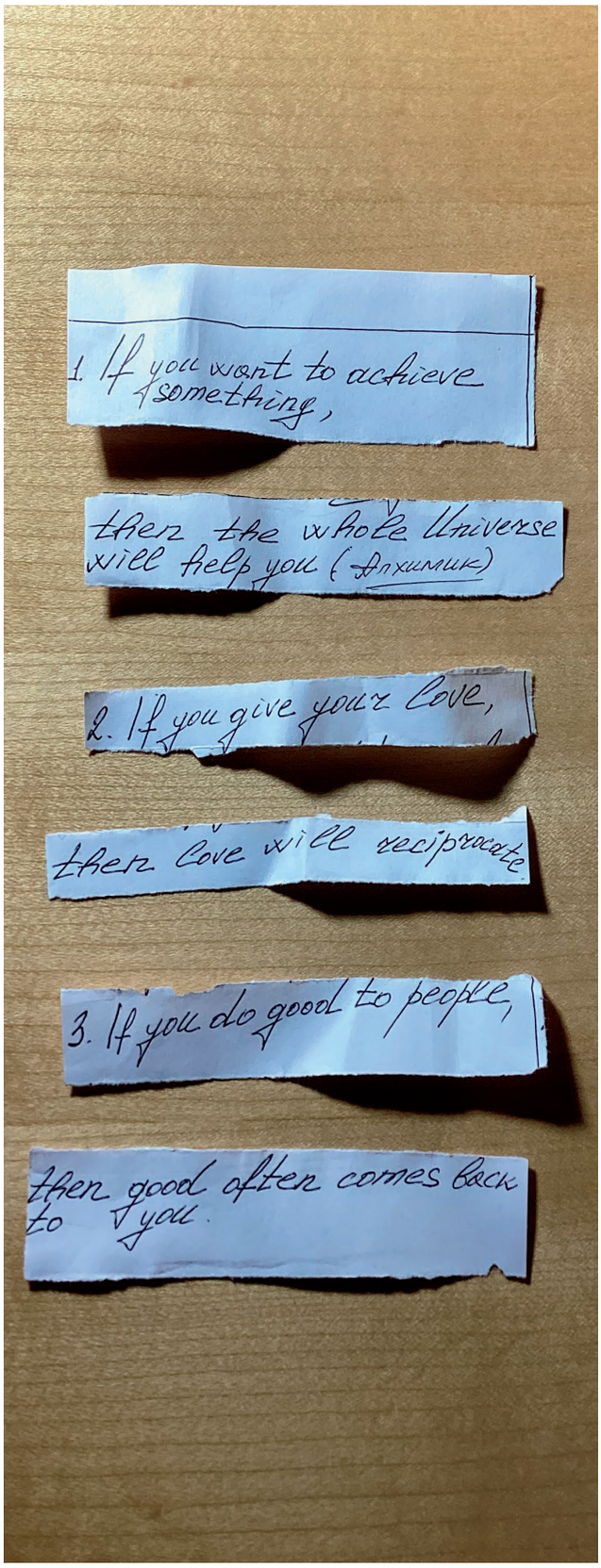
If you want to find a treasure
Don't waste time on leisure

If you want to achieve something
Then the whole universe will help you

If you give your love
Love will reciprocate

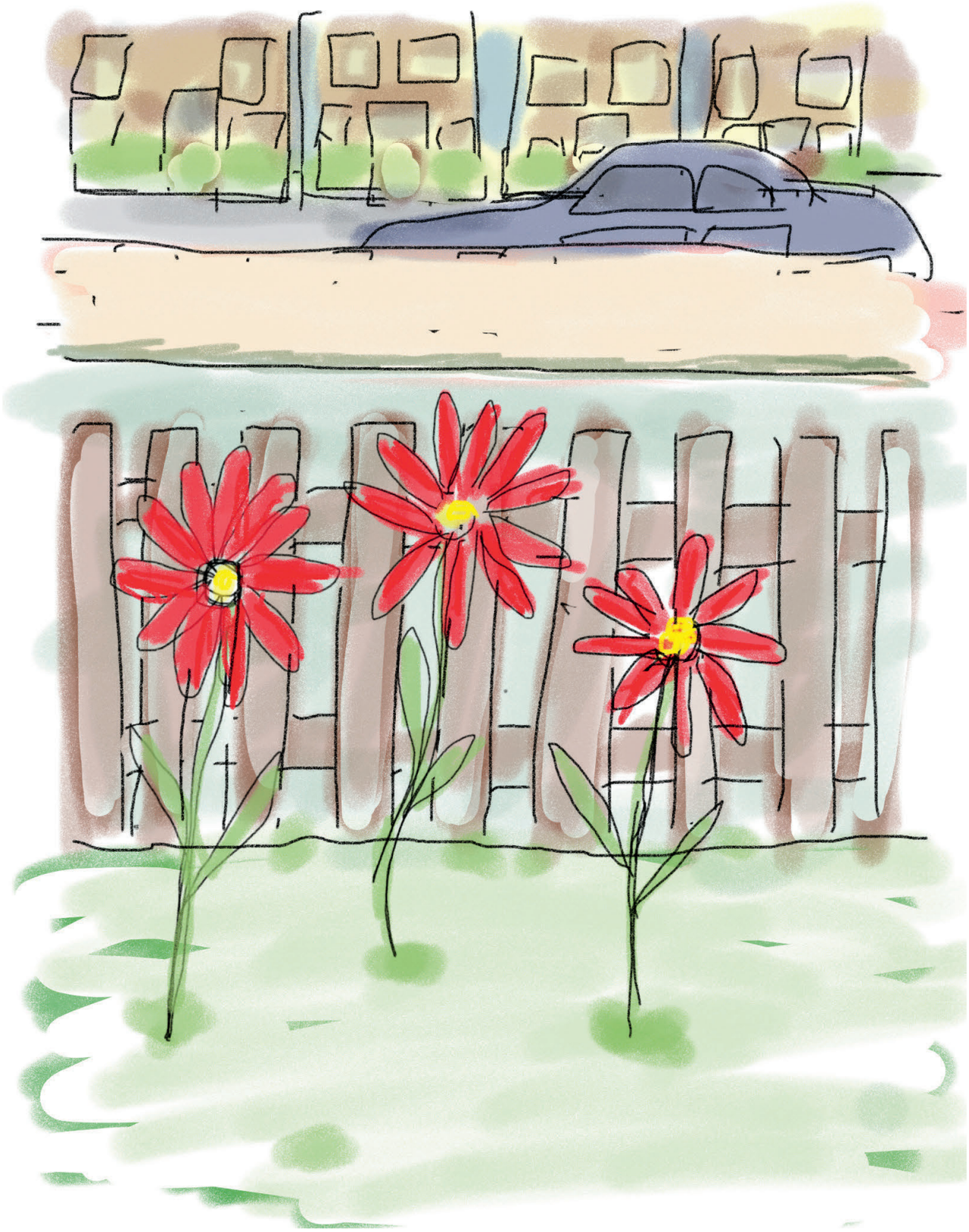
If you do good to people
Good often comes back to you


IF you love your enemy
THEN he might become your frenemy.
IF you wake up early morning
THEN you eat a bread with honey.
IF you want to find a treasure
THEN don't waste your time ~~for~~ in leisure.


1. If you want to achieve something,
then the whole Universe will help you (Алхимик)
2. If you give your love,
then love will reciprocate
3. If you do goood to people,
then good often comes back to you.

The View Outside

Outside I am seeing beautiful red flowers, which growing close to the wooden fence. I'm feeling myself better than yesterday because it's blows breeze now. I'm so glad that there are people who can help me with my English. I really like this fresh air which is outside.



Appendix 6

With All the Power in My Soul

writing from the
Voices of Hope
Creative Writing Group

Truth Creativity/enjoyment

Activism

EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS
CHALLENGE TO NEW WAYS OF
EXPRESSION
CONFIDENCE THAT MY STORY
AND EXPRESSION IS OKAY

LEARN TECHNIQUES
EXPLORE
DELVE IN TO SELF

Introduction

This is a book of creative writing that was produced during a project that took place in 2022.

We worked together for ten sessions, which were by turns joyful, intense, celebratory, playful and reflective.

Slowly we created a special atmosphere within the group, an atmosphere that fostered creative work and self expression.

You can see the results of this work in the following pages.

With very many thanks to:

Carlene Stanislaus, Paula Steele, Maddie Anlezark, Beth Davis, Sara Carby, Kaz Kowlessar

The sessions were run and the book was produced by Richard Neville

Thanks also to
Sarah Clay, CEO Voices of Hope, for initiating the Pearl project and promoting the sessions

and to

Kingston Library Service and Kingston University for their support during the project

LOTTERY FUNDED
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THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Kingston University London

Little Tiny Caterpillar
By Beth Davis

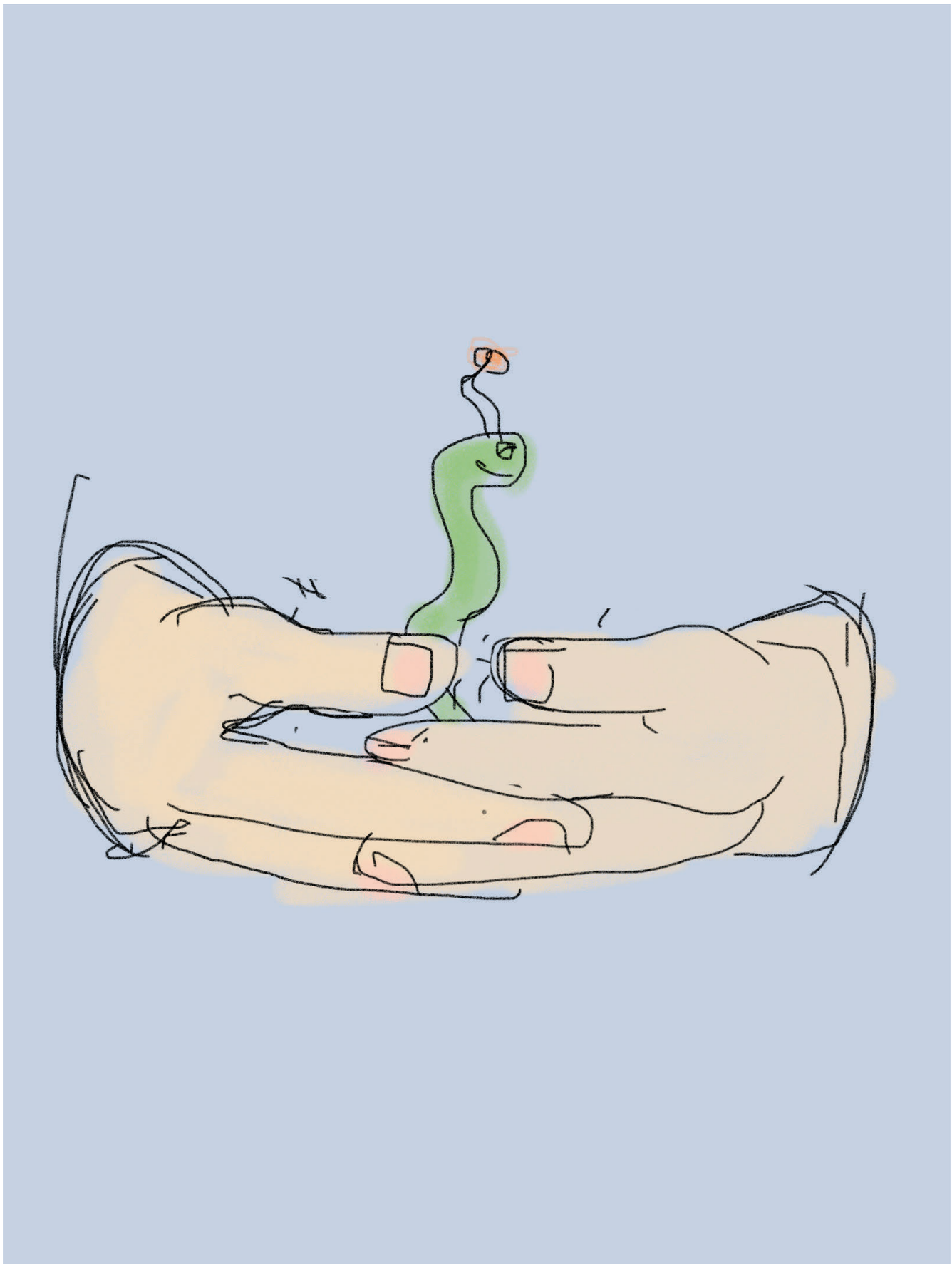
Little tiny caterpillar
Inching his way across
The chasm of my hand
His goal to be a moth

Little tiny caterpillar
Finds a tasty leaf
Nibble here, nibble there
Oh what a blessed relief

Little tiny caterpillar
Spins his brown cocoon
Snuggles down for a long, long sleep
Don’t wake up too soon

Little tiny caterpillar
Eating his way out
His latest home now wrack and ruin
Bright colours all about

Little tiny caterpillar
Inching his way across
The chasm of my hand
His goal to be a moth



Three weeks at The Quaker Centre
Kingston Upon Thames
by Maddie Anlezark

29th August 2022

Trees, decades old, stand tall and guard the front of the plot. So many colours and shapes are seen on their trunks that you could stand and stare at them for ever.

The building is simple and gives focus to its surroundings rather than to itself. The hard, green metal and wire fence has been fronted with a softer, woven fence made from branches – soft and natural.

The grass is brown and the trees drooping a little due to unusually hot and dry weather. The leaves on some of the trees are drooping and there are yellow and brown leaves on the ground, though it is early yet for autumn. But, there is still life and colour from some geraniums and a wheelbarrow full of flowering plants.

The scene is brought to life by numerous tiny caterpillars hanging from the trees by a slender thread. As one falls onto my hand, I see that it is almost transparent so that I can see the blood flowing through it while it's muscles are working to move across my hand. Life so minute, and yet so fascinating and full of energy.

There is a peaceful atmosphere about the place, despite the noise of a demolition crew knocking down an adjacent building. As they take a break one drinks in the quiet.

16th September 2022

Today the grass and the trees are lush in their many shades of green. The wind whispers through the trees with an occasional clatter of leaves when the wind gusts. I find the sound of the wind in the trees peaceful and calming. It is reminiscent of waves swishing in and out over a beach. There is movement as well as the trees change their shape when the wind blows through them.

Do the trees merely react to outside forces such as the wind? Or, do they have a life of their own? When I saw them a while ago, were they pained by the lack of water to nourish them and the heat of the sun scorching them? Are they now celebrating the rain and cooler weather as their leaves flutter and rustle? Are they happy about their bright hue and their healthy appearance? Do they recognise the transformation and renewal that has happened?

If I look at the whole surroundings of the Quaker centre I feel peace and calm. Like an oasis in the middle of a busy city. Across the road there is stability and security in the terrace of cottages, looking simple, almost like a house that a child would draw, and yet sturdy and safe. There is a comfort in knowing that they have stood here over many years. I wonder about those living in them. So close to shops, library, transport systems, rush and bustle. Yet there is shade from the trees and access to green space in which to relax.

I am aware of many sounds, varied colours, and a richness of different things to look at. I feel calm, relaxed and rested.

But, all may not be calm and peaceful. The cottages across the road would once have been workers cottages yet now one would need a healthy bank balance to buy one of them. I wonder whether somebody is still sleeping rough the other side of the fence where there is a duvet, a blanket, a pillow and some empty drink cans. There is building work going on close by and evidence of change going on close by. All is not stable and yet we do have this oasis in a busy city area.

23rd September 2022

This tree is magnificent
Tall and leafy, providing shade;
Brown leaves, green leaves and all colours between;
Spiky leaves with three spikes to them;
Thin leaf stems on which you clearly see where they were attached to a branch of the tree.
The trunk is tall and wide in girth;
On it are many layers of bark, different in colour and texture,
Greens and browns and yellows creating different shapes.

How long have you stood here tree?
What changes have you seen tree?

You are coming close to shedding your leaves and taking a rest over winter;
We know you will be back next spring ready to start the cycle again;
You understand the rhythm of time – the changes that take place, the cycle of life that is yours;
Despite these rhythms of change you have stability and strength and certainty;
The promise of regeneration over and over is present in you.
This tree is magnificent

Poems
By Carlene Stanislaus

Searching

When things get tough and I feel lost
My soul seeks solace and peace
Where is my solace?
Where is my peace?
I search within
At times there’s nothing there

I wander and I roam
I look to those of influence, power, poise and prolific positions
World leaders, teachers, mentors and high-profile influencers

Who are they?
Strip back the layers, the garments adorned, the lifestyles portrayed
It goes further, deeper and beyond
Herald as great
They impact the world

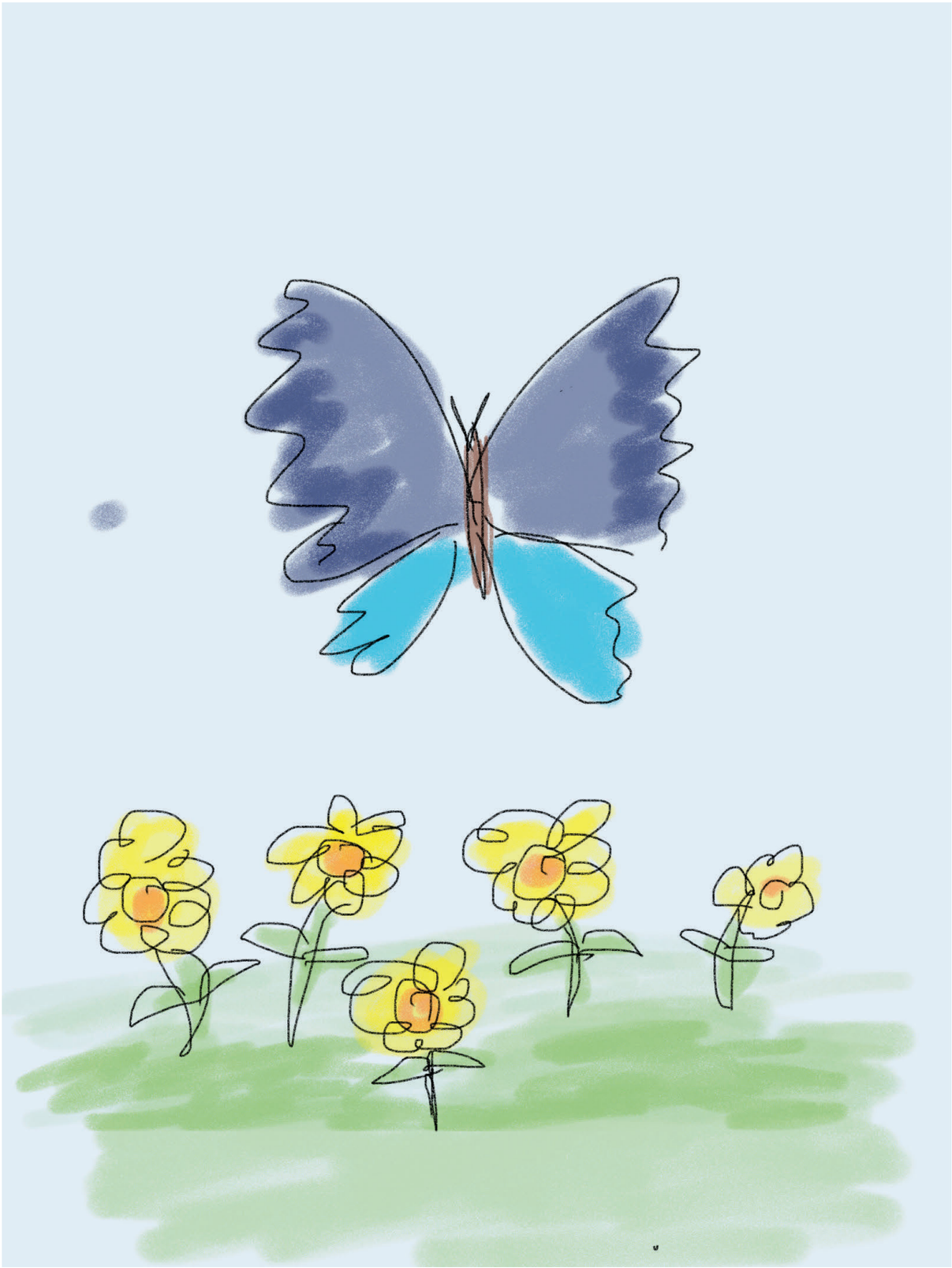
So while we look up to world leaders and we follow these so called iconic influencers
Let us go deeper
And see what we discover
Search your heart, search your soul
Know thyself
When it's all said and done
That's the ultimate goal

Look within
You'll see your greatness
Your hidden treasure
No man can measure
You were born great
You're a perfect gifting

Now is the time to see your light
You're a perfect creation
You shine so bright
Unshackle the chains
Unbreak the ties that bind

Walk in your beauty
Walk in your light
All veils are lifted
Your search has now ended

The solace and peace
You used to seek
Resides way down deep
Way down deep inside of you
The leader you seek
Was always in you

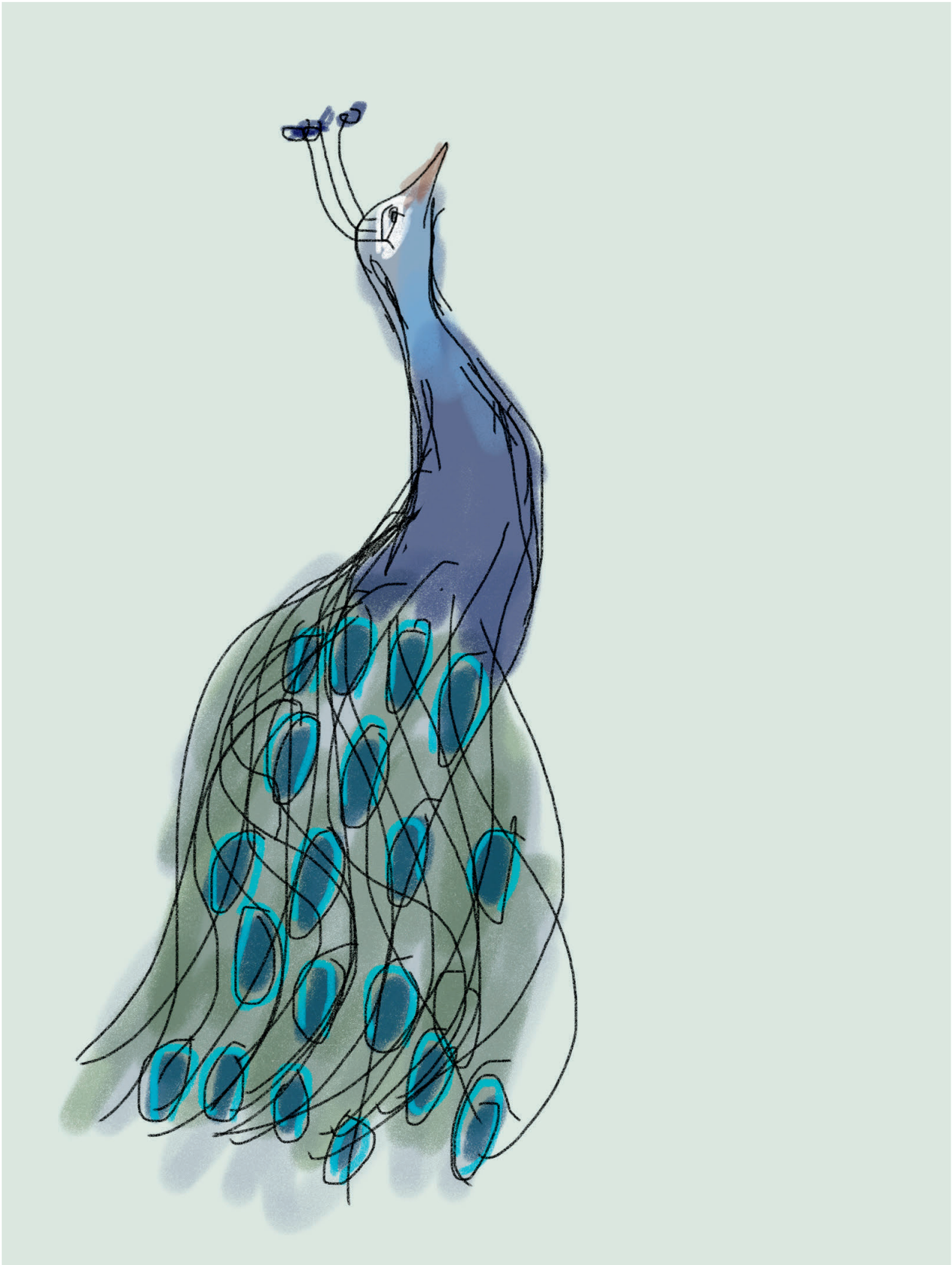


My Message

Abused and bullied by those I trusted
Confused, manipulated, lost and afraid
That's how they left me
The narcissist will live with their guilt eroding their life and conscious
Triggered and traumatised by my past
These things I couldn’t control
Grief loss and depression
All play their part in my journey
So what now
It’s okay
Cos I’ve got this
My life means so much more
Than what has gone before
And all the things I've had to endure

I weathered the storms
And I’m still here
I’m still here
I’m going to keep on keeping on
With life, breath and God beside me
I am rising up and I will overcome
I will always fight for me

You see that abused and bullied little girl she's gone
No longer am I oppressed, suppressed or depressed
I have triumphed over the trials and tribulations of my life
I am liberated and free to live my life sharing a new story
I am my message of hope, love, light, kindness, joy and glory.
I am my message, I'm not my mess



I Rise

Out of the dust I take form
Out of the dust like the phoenix, my flame burns bright
In the darkest night my flame radiates hues of yellow, orange, red and white

In the distant sky my light illuminates the sky at night
Like the stars in the sky I’m high
With all the power in my soul
And the divine essence in my spirit
Like the phoenix I rise
I rise

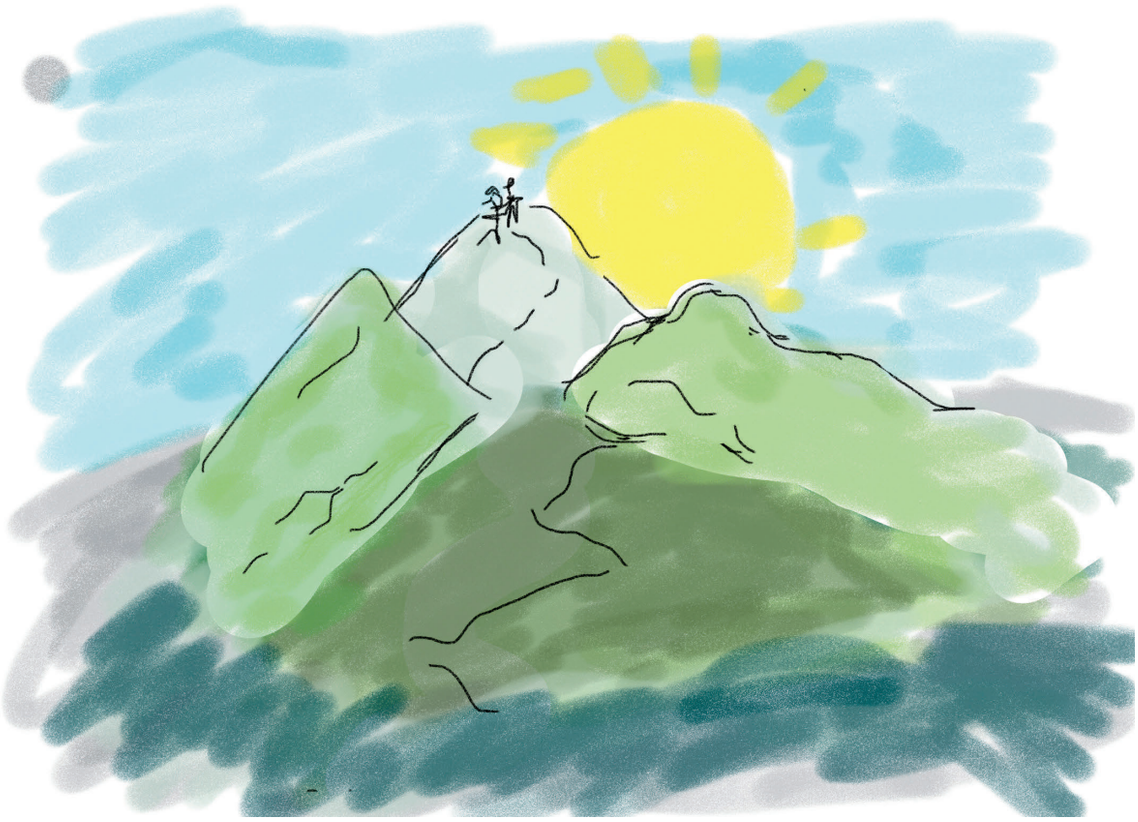
Fly With Me

Come fly with me
I'm going to take you on a journey
It's okay to close your eyes and trust me
It's okay to journey far and wide and just be
Don't be afraid to explore
There are times in life when you have to leave the shore

The Warrior

I stand tall and strong
Confident that I can withstand the storm
I will prevail
I will overcome

Rhyming Journey
by Paula Steele
(Dance - Prance , Follow - Wallow ,
Climbing- Arriving , Temple - Mental)



The music pulls us to dance
I follow and wallow and prance...
Moving now together we are climbing, climbing, climbing...
When or where will we be arriving ...
Top of the world, free and present...
A temple!
Oh my, this is mental...

Poems
by Sara Carby

Iridescent

I am an iridescent pearl
Not a mere girl
Power lies inside my shell
Within layers of shimmering inner wisdom
Reflecting purity, no more will she tolerate less than shining bright
Healing and rising, knowing with surety that her light is a gift
Won't act as if she doesn’t care or unaware that her gleam is meant to be seen.

I am an iridescent gem
My feminine embrace,
alongside grace and beauty
It is our duty to nurture that lustre
Not worry about being too much and know that
glossy orb of watery birth, all thanks to a speck of dirt is finally unearthed
Submergence, the pearl, magical, mystical she emerges
Destined to be cherished, each one so unique and precious
Mother Nature’s present
A gem, a gift,
I am iridescent

Good girls

Good girls learn to sew,
I do archery, where’s my bow?

Genie journey

A genie appeared in a hazy cloud
Wtf, I cry aloud
He came towards me from the mist
Declaring I must make a wish.

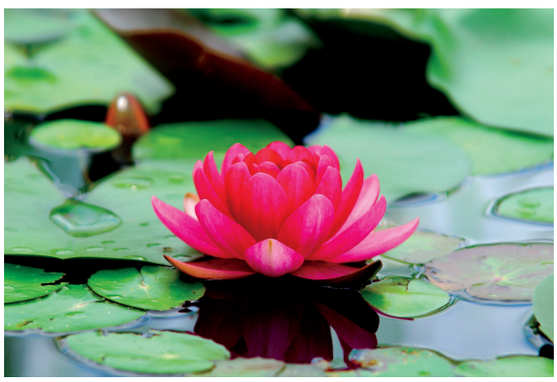
Lost

I got so lost within the crowd
As people danced and twirled around
I felt dizzy the colours too loud
Retreating, my solace is in the clouds

Haikus

A wistful exhale
The lotus flower blossoms
A gesture of peace

Yellow butterfly
Flitting in roadside hedges
Calling to being



Proverbs

If you loosen the reigns on life
Then you will allow room to roam freely

If you are always spinning
Then you will always feel dizzy

If you believe in yourself
You will always succeed

If you quit at the first hurdle
You will watch everyone else win

Creation

The trumpet sounds, calling for a revelation
The story is ours, producing, creating
Trust in the heart, the deepest connection
We own the pen so write a new ending.

Reflections

Take a moment to look within
You radiate beauty
I see my heart
I know I am love

Take a moment to look in the mirror
See how beautiful you are
I see my face
I look away

So easy to see it in others
I see radiant beauty
Maybe I am beautiful too
There is so much love in my heart
Reflect on why
I am shy

"We own the pen so write a new ending"

Laughter is life

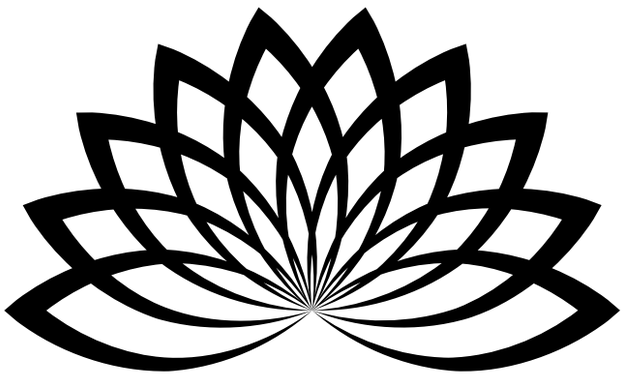
The importance of laughter in life,
Don't moan release your happy hormones,
Let your inner child to be wild,
Let slapstick uplift,
Allow catharsis to take place
As tears rolled down your face and your belly aches and your body shakes
I cannot stress
When life feels like a mess
The importance of laughter in life

Hope

End of your rope
Hang on
Hope
You are strong

Lost throne

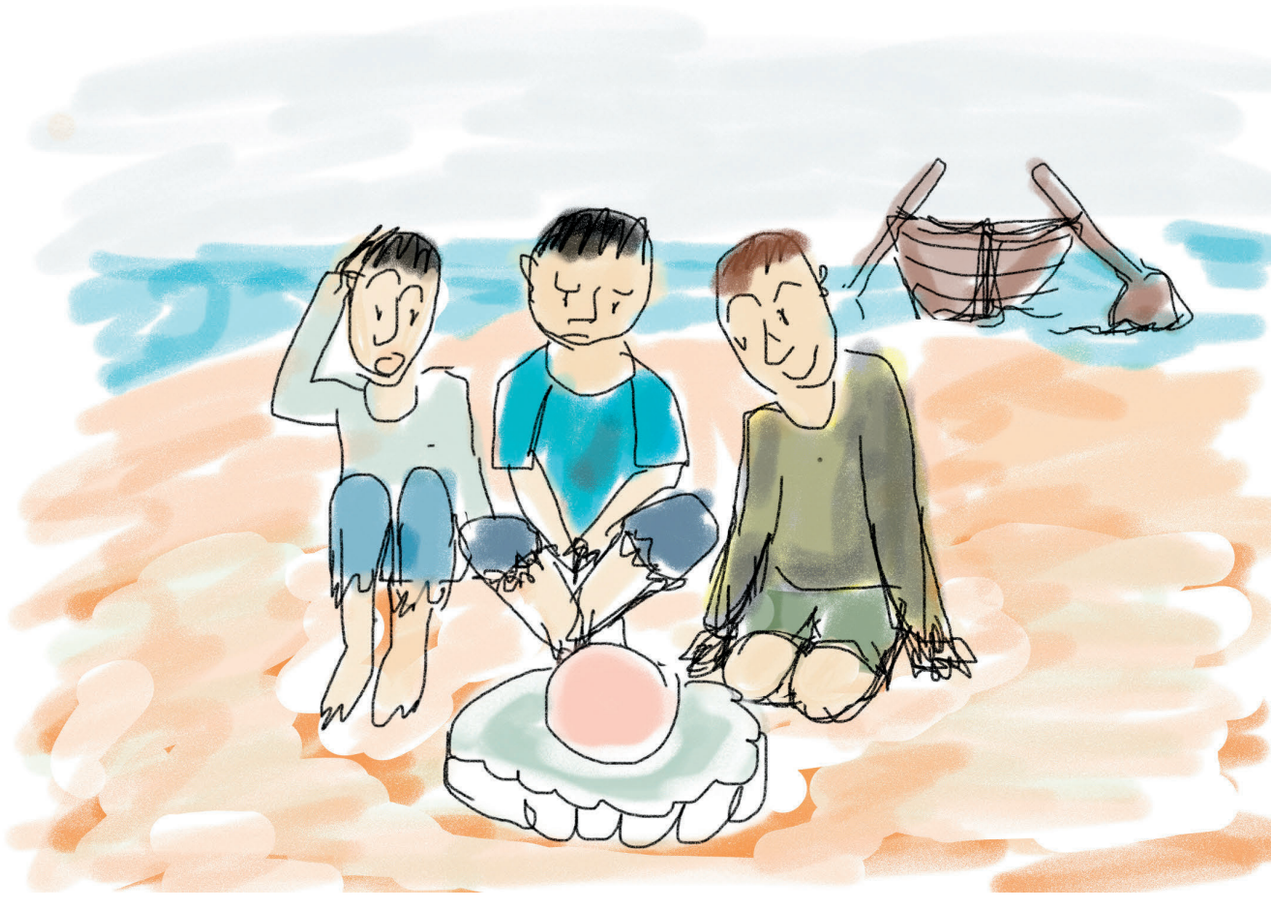
I lost myself, I couldn't find me, I looked, I searched, I dug down deep
Devoid of joy, cold and alone,
trapped by demons in the devil’s home
I lost the person I once was, had to hide
Until I find who I really am, I’ll remain empty on the inside
I lost who I was, but as I retrace my steps
I'm emerging from self-imposed murky depths
Not allowing myself to be free, liberating the joy inside of me
As I struggle to reclaim my throne,
emembering we are both born in this world and die alone
I walk this earth to not merely exist,
I must live this life as I see fit
It’s safe to be heard, safe to be seen, to be me
in unwavering certainty



The Story of the Great Pearl

by

Kaz Kowlessar



I would like to invite you to spend some time listening to a true story, told by my ancestors of a distinct social & cultural group of indigenous people, with shared collective ancestral ties to the land of natural resources.

The deep Amazon Rainforest is pulsating with life on all levels. When you look up you can sometimes see a group of tamarind monkeys traversing the canopy, look down and there is a root to help a toothache, look left to catch the movement of a group of giant peccaries fading into the distance, and to the right, plants to help with all that ails your mind and spirit. Delve into the rainforest and discover all manner of intellectual wonderful things to cure most diseases!

In the 18th century my great grandparents told of a story which were passed on by many generations before about a great Pink Pearl!

This great treasure had been discovered in the bottom of the Laguna where we would swim daily. Majestic creatures in their natural habitat and the whole colour spectrum displayed on various species of fish. Life was relatively peaceful & calm, whilst feasting on wild boar, eggs, birds whose feathers made for colourful head coverings. As children we would play, discovering something new every day. Amongst the lush vegetation there was a whole host of food to choose from. The sun acted as our daily clock. We had ripe pickings from the land to the sea, and still further afield.

If we had a rainy season (much welcomed after endless days of heat) our huge huts stood strong as our living quarters which would shelter us, the huts were built high above the ground not only to last but to withhold any villages that might want to attack us, built by the elders making them secure and stable, made from fibres entwined they lasted many years. Having them high off the ground helped to keep the deadly insects at bay. We loved the hammocks swaying us to sleep, as we listened to the familiar noises of insects wooing & cooing each other in the dark.

The deep Amazon Rainforest is pulsing with life, orchestrated by perfect pitched levels of sound. My grandfather began to tell us a tale which was part of the weekly ritual, as kids we were mesmerised hanging on to every word, as we munched fried bugs.

On this particular day the story began with some younger men, who were taught where to find the freshest fish, way out into the Laguna, using paddles to steer the boats made by hand & smeared with a form of tar to stop the water coming in.

This day they dived as deep as possible with knives constructed by hand held firmly between their teeth, holding their breath for as long as seven minutes, a world record by my reckoning! As they reached the depths of the cooler sea's temperature way down nearer on the ocean's floor one of the boys noticed a huge shell, it seemed to be calling to him, he went deeper curious as if the shell was not going to let him go back up until he had inquired of it. It seemed to be beckoning him to take the shell in his hands.

Almost as if he was having a spiritual intervention he went for it, he tore the shell from the coral it was perched on. He was now swimming upwards gasping for breath, once up he threw the shell into the boat as it bounced on the deck floor, to his amazement a massive pink pearl rolled out from the shell's opening.

He called to the others as eyes grew realising he had discovered the very pearl he heard the elders talking about way back in the day during their younger years. With trepidation & excitement he beckoned the others to come up and see this great treasure. Once the others saw his joy, they boarded the boat & they glared in disbelief, punching the air they started laughing and hugging with a feeling that they hadn't ever experienced before.

When they calmed down in a moment of unity without saying a word they knew they'd have to take it to the elders to see if it was the same pearl that was lost somewhere on the ocean's floor? They paddled as fast as possible reaching the dry land they moored the boat, running with excitement they suddenly became quiet like it was their secret to behold, all they could hear were the beats of their hearts coming out of their chests as their eyes met in disbelief.

Reaching the village together they asked to speak with the elder. They showed him the beautiful lustre palest of pink pearl, he gasped holding out his hand to take this precious gift given by the Gods.

In awe he called the other elders as to what they should do with such a find? The majority's votes were to hide it safely in one's clothing & take it to the main port some thirty nine kilometres away. With the same mindset they agreed to sell it to the highest bidder, this must be accomplished by the fittest boy and elder, in exchange for as much financial gain as possible, it could reach as much as half a million at least!

The journey on foot was a challenge to say the least, they waited until the sun went down, so as to be hidden. They had to endure going through rough terrain at the same time keeping their heads low! Using the moonlight for light taking a food flask and blanket wrapped around them they steadily made their way down in between the grasses edging ever closer to their destination. They made quite a few kilometres before stopping having a drink then covering themselves to sleep. They awoke with the rising of the sun, shaking the blanket, tying it on their backs as they headed further downwards towards dim lights that were stirring in the new day, they were still quite far off.

Carrying such a precious commodity was causing them stress that they hadn't experienced before! Mile by mile ducking & diving they could hear the animals' pitches fade way into the background, but were still aware of snakes, scorpion & such like. The grounds were becoming flatter as they uneasily made their way towards a town whose roads were in now in focus, this gave them a new surge of energy, quickening their steps.

The distance clearly showed the difference up high in the hills where their dwelling stood, now out of sight. Way ahead the road was wider, in the distance lorries were picking up workers equipped with spades and pick axes to mine out caves for gems supposedly deep underground, ready to do a day's work. This was such unfamiliar territory for the men they were feeling vulnerable & scared, but the price of this pink pearl gave them the anticipation to carry on.

After a quarter of the day, they came across some men who they asked where the quarters were to do bidding for gems. So as not to give anything away they said they were looking to perhaps bid today. The men directed them another quarter of a day's ahead. Telling them when they see the building with the yellow roof to go in there, which was still a long way off.

They were starting to miss home but continued on foot speeding up to avoid becoming encased in darkness, as the dark is not gradual in those climes, but like a light bulb switches off. They were getting tired & weak hoping it was only one more day's walk ahead...

A way ahead off the beaten track they saw some lights of what looked like a house, the closer they got showed it was an old wooden shack. The building was of a wooden exterior with a veranda, as they gingerly approached looking inside the window they saw two silhouettes of an elderly couple sitting at a table, whilst a kettle leaned against the fire place.
On the couch across the room were two mean looking young men polishing & burnishing a machete. Because the young men looked so evil they figured they would forget about knocking, quietly they turned towards the road.

With their hearts feeling despondent and low they carried on, wondering how or where they could shelter for just one more night. Both of them knew that they would have to speak to their spirits to profoundly show them signs along the way, they had to remember the vision this one amazing pearl can bring, achieving great things. Never in their wildest dreams did they imagine that the Gods would give such a gift...

Without a word between them they knew that they mustn't let their emotions whirl them out of control! The process may be long and challenging. But it's possible. The dark started creeping in as the skies were lined with silhouettes of palm trees. During the walk they were aware of animals awakening as night took over the day of brilliant sunshine. They made their way down to the road, continuing they distinctly heard bracken cracking quite loudly behind them, this made them nervous and they trod more lightly to distinguish whether they were imagining it?

They stopped walking & talking as this time they were both aware that in fact someone was behind them, they squinted their eyes to try and focus on what the noise was. The elder held the precious pearl even more closely against his ribs, clutching it tightly.

Suddenly from the shadows two men walked up to them with machetes, they recognised them as the ones who they saw in the window of the wooden shack! Both the elder & the boy asked what do you want?

“Where do you think you are going?” said one of the men.
The elder answered “We are making our way down to the harbour”
“Why?”
“Cause a relative works there”
“Empty your pockets” the menacing worn out mouth of evil said,
“No” said the elder, “now go away!”

With that, the menacing evil pulled the machete out of its holdall whilst threatening the elder. He was in shock thinking how was it possible that the Gods have given us this pearl for it to be taken away?

“Empty your bag, shake out your blanket, we are taking what you have NOW!!!!”

When they saw the precious pink pearl they grabbed it, warned the two “do not follow us or you’re dead”, as their eyes were totally mesmerised at what a find they’ve got.

Pushing the elder & boy out of the way, they walked away with the pearl, laughing and shouting “ha ha ha!!!” They had held up many people in the past but never ever had such ripe pickings.

Despondent & bewildered the elder & boy slumped down where they stood trying to comprehend what had just happened? Making their way back home, the only comfort they derived was by knowing what goes around comes around and those men will suffer.

Now walking home the silence was deafening as both tried to put into words to the tribe so as to understand the predicament of the lost pearl, which still lives on…. The end but also the beginning as the adventure of the pearl proceeds on and on!!!

Ghost Story
By Beth Davis

The six children stood in a tight circle, watching the house with a feeling of trepidation. They had heard the rumours. The family who had lived there had all vanished one night, twenty years ago, a night very like this one.

As the children look around them, the mist with its tendrils swept across the ground like snakes, creeping slowly towards the children.

None of the group wanted to see what would happen if the snake-like mist reached them and covered them like an immense blanket.

“I think we need to move, like…now!” whispered George, the eldest of the six.

“N…n…n…not to the house?” asked Lucy, stuttering with fear.

“If we are going to win that bet!” said George dramatically, “then, yes, come on…”

Earlier in the day, during a particularly boring playtime, George, the leader of the gang, had dared that his fearless group could go to the house on the hill and play a game of hide and seek. Now they were there, the whole thing didn’t look quite as simple.

“All we have to do is go just inside the house and have a quick game downstairs and then come out again.”
“OK, George” said Ben, his voice shaking slightly, “Who is taking the pictures for proof?”
“Me”, whispered Rachel
“Great, all ready then?” George asked, looking around the group, trying to look and sound brave.

The children slowly crept towards the front of the house. As they advanced, the branches of the trees and the thick brambles tugged at the children’s hair and clothes, pushing and pulling them towards then away from the house.

Suddenly George stopped dead in his tracks, the other five bumping into each other. He looked around at his gang.

“Guys, did you see that figure in the upstairs window?”
“Shut up George!” Lucy and Rachel shouted, then huddled together looking around in desperation.

“Let’s just get on with it” said Fred, who up till then had been silent.
The group looked at George for the signal to advance.

The fog was getting denser as the children crept to the immense front door. Alison, the youngest of the group, began to whimper. Rachel gave her a hug and a tight smile, mouthing words of comfort, but all that escaped was a squeak.

George opened the front door and they all bundled in.

“OK, let’s do this” said George. “Rachel, get some pictures”.
“I’ll count to twenty and everyone hides, then I’ll find you, don’t go upstairs”, instructed Ben.

Ben covered his eyes and began: “nineteen, twenty, here I come, ready or not”. The words echoed around the vast hallway.

Ben looked around, he felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise up. The floor was thick with dust but there were no footprints, not even his own.

“Hey, stop mucking around” he shouted.
The only response was the ominous echo.
“This isn’t funny anymore”.

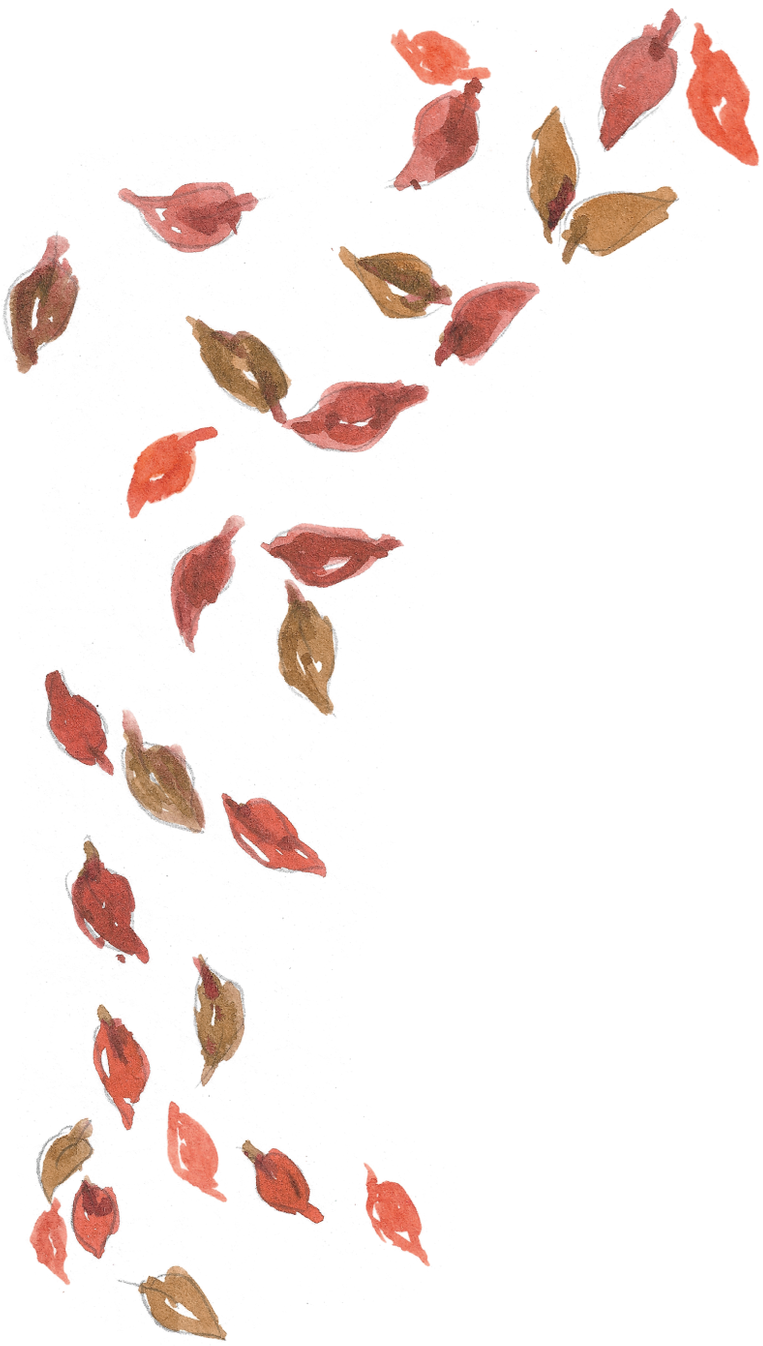
He looked around wildly. Where had they gone? He rushed to one of the closed doors and pulled it open. It was empty. When he looked back, no foot prints, no dust motes flying.

Ben couldn’t understand what had happened.
“Where are you?” He sobbed.

Through the blur of his tears, five tiny lights came drifting into the hallway from their hiding places. They gathered into a tight circle around Ben. He felt light and peaceful as he lifted himself up to join them.

Two weeks later, the police had managed to track the group to the house. When the police looked up, six children were watching from a downstairs window.

The Best Day of My Life
By Beth Davis



Oh, where do I start? It happened all of a sudden.

I was walking down a beautiful leaf strewn road. There were leaves of a hundred different colours being blown by the wind, creating lots of mini tornadoes. I stood still for a while to watch, a hint of a smile on my face as I was taken back to that oh so special day when I was out with my two beautiful girls.

The day started much the same as all days do.
“What are we going to do today mummy?”, my four year-old asked, bouncing up and down with excitement, her flaxen blond ringlets in total disarray already, even though I had just managed to tame them.

I smiled and told them we could do anything they wanted. Instantly, they both giggled in that special way that only four and five year olds can.

“Can we got to the park and look for fairies and unicorns?”
“Definitely”, I responded.

It was total chaos for a while, it never ceases to amaze me how two tiny girls can suddenly seem like ten. We were ready at last.

“OK, I said, “Do you have a magnifying glass to find fairy footsteps?”
“Check”, they both yelled
“Do you have your telescopes to see the unicorns, when they are hiding?”
“Check!” This time bouncing up and down.
“Fantastic, and I have water and a snack”.

By this point they were so excited that it was difficult for them to stand still long enough to put on their coats and wellies.

After a short bus ride, we were in the park and my two fairy and unicorn hunters had settled into checking the immediate area for fairy rings, footsteps and tiny doors at the base of trees.

One of them squealed loudly when she found some deer poo, convinced it belonged to a unicorn. Just as if by magic there was a flash of light reflected on the water beyond the trees and that was enough to convince them that there was a unicorn in the park.

We sat down on the grass, each of us with our own private smile on our faces, reflecting on the unique experience and the beautiful memories that we had made together.

Perfect.

Final Words
by Paula Steele

"Can I just take this moment to say how wonderful and inspirational your creative writing methodology is. I've thoroughly enjoyed the process and the enthusiasm and positivity that you brought to the group. It was a contagion, that ran wild throughout the ladies. We literally were bursting out with creative ideas and thoughts in our writing. Thank you for being such an understanding and thoughtful guide for this to unfold in each of us.

As a girl at secondary school with dyslexia (they never knew about that back in the late 70's, early 80's) I was put into a remedial class as a lazy pupil who had no hope of ever being entitled to show I had ideas and thoughts that could be seen as creative. Funny thing though, I could do algebra in my head, I guess I got typecast as stupid and incapable.

I'm lucky though as I went on to study at university as a mature student. With understanding and a little help, it's amazing what you can achieve.

This is what you have gifted to the ladies in your creative writing workshop, the opportunity and belief that they all have the ability to tap into their own ideas and make something from nothing into an amazing piece of creative writing."

Appendix 7: Observation template

Partner Organisation:	Session number/Date:
Format: [Online/Face-to-Face]	
Structure:	
Activities:	
Techniques:	
Evaluation:	
Additional notes:	

Appendix 8: Participant evaluation Facilitator Guide.

What does success look like?

- Why did you want to take part in the programme?
    - KL in particular?
- Did the project do what you thought it would do?
- What did your organisation tell you about the project before you started? Is this what happened?
- Have you done any storytelling/storytelling activities before?
    - Were these through your current organisation?
- Would you want to do more storytelling?
- Can you think of any benefits storytelling has had for you/community/organisation?
    - Immediate and lasting

Effectiveness of sessions

- Did you enjoy the sessions? What worked/didn't?
    - Do you think the rest of the group did?
- Did any particular activities stick in your mind? Why?
- How did attending the sessions make you feel? Or what effect did they have on you?
    - Wellbeing/social interactions/skills development.
    - Differences between participants?
- What could be changed to make the sessions better?
- Would you be interested in doing similar activities with Kingston Libraries/other community groups?
    - What might this look like? Who with?

Additional Prompts

What does success look like:

- What did storytelling mean to you before you started? Has this changed?
- What value is there in storytelling?
- How might storytelling benefit you?
- How might storytelling benefit others in your organisation/community/society?
- Why did you attend the sessions?
- What did you hope to achieve by running the sessions? (Did you achieve it?)
- What would you like to see done in future sessions?

Effectiveness of session:

- Did you enjoy the sessions?
- What worked well? What didn't?
- What storytelling exercises stick out in your memory? Why?
- Do you think you have changed as a storyteller?
- Have you enjoyed collaborating when storytelling? Has it changed your relationship with the other participants?
- What have you learned?
- Would you recommend attending the sessions? If yes, why? If no, why?

Appendix 9: Staff Interview Facilitator Guide.

What does success look like?

- *What interested you in joining the project?*
    - *KL in particular?*

- *Do you think the project was successful? Why/why not?*
    - *Did you have a clear aim? Was this an exploration of potential…*

- *What role, if any, did storytelling have in your organisation prior to the programme?*

- *Has this changed/do you think this will change?*

- *What benefits has storytelling, and the activities, brought to your organisation? Your community?*
    - *Immediate and lasting.*

- *If you were doing the programme again, what might you change? Why?*
    - *[Remove as similar prompt in next section]*

Effectiveness of sessions

- *Did you enjoy the sessions? What worked/didn't?*

- *Did any particular activities stick in your mind? Why?*
    - *Which do they think their participants enjoyed?*

- *What effect did attending have on your clients/members/participants?*
    - *Wellbeing/social interactions/skills development.*
    - *Differences between participants?*

- *What could be changed to make the sessions more beneficial to your organisation? And for your clients?*

- *Would you be interested in doing similar activities with Kingston Libraries/other community groups?*
    - *What might this look like? Who with?*

- *Would you feel comfortable running a storytelling session yourself?*
    - *What additional support might you need/want?*