

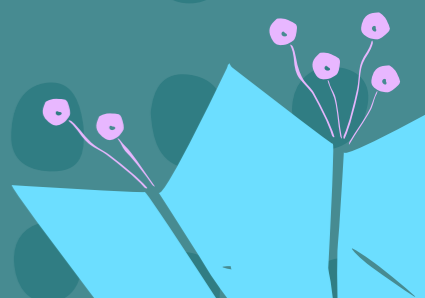
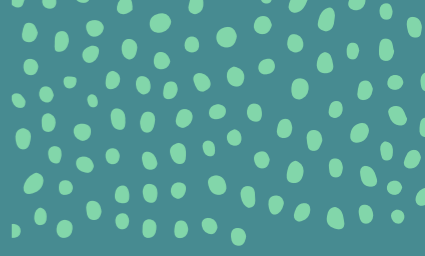


# SOLIDARITY IN ACTION 2021

*A journey in global  
citizenship education*

SUPPORTED BY

**CONCERN**  
worldwide



## Welcome from UCDVO

UCDVO is a registered charity based within UCD Global, in University College Dublin. We work to provide transformational learning experiences for the UCD community through our volunteer and global citizenship education programmes (GCE). We were delighted in 2021 to pilot Solidarity in Action, as part of our GCE programme. Solidarity in Action was a three-month course or learning journey, created by UCDVO and Comhlámh, delivered by Comhlámh and funded by Concern Worldwide.

Operating within a university context, UCDVO is fortunate to engage with a diverse and vibrant community. We strive to offer this community a range of opportunities or pathways, to meet people 'where they are at' in their global citizenship journey. Since 2013 we have offered two evening courses in partnership Comhlámh (Be the Change and Skills in Development Education) for the UCD community to come together to learn about global development and social justice issues in a friendly and informal environment.

Solidarity in Action builds on the spirit of these spaces, as an education process that works to cultivate stamina and resilience. It is a course that looks to reconnect UCDVO with our alumni as they transition from university student to university graduate, and to build principles of global citizenship into long-term thinking around justice, interdependence and responsibility. As one participant said "Where in Skills in Development Education, I felt I was up skilling, in Solidarity in Action, I felt I was deep diving, learning skills that I never knew were needed or even ever existed."

Reconnecting with many of our alumni for this course was one of the great joys that we encountered and we continue to be inspired and energised by the people and communities we meet. We hope you enjoy the reflections shared in this publication written by the course participants in response to their time on Solidarity in Action.

Many thanks to Concern Worldwide for their support through the Development Education Grants Scheme and to Micheal Doorly, Head of Active Citizenship at Concern.

Zoe Liston,  
Programme and Education Officer, UCDVO.

UCD Volunteers Overseas (UCDVO) is a charity registered with the Charities Regulator (Registered Charity Number 20055776)

## A note from Comhlámh

Over the past number of years, Comhlámh has been partnering with UCDVO on two evening courses, Be the Change and Skills in Development Education. Endeavouring to take participants beyond (potentially limiting) expectations of learning ‘how to be a good activist’, or ‘how to be a good facilitator’, these 2 courses invite participants to examine themselves as part of complex, interdependent and unequal systems and to ground ‘action’ in connection.

Solidarity in Action 2021 was similarly oriented and involved a group of 17 participants, the majority of whom had previously participated in Be the Change and Skills. The 3-month long programme hinged around 3 main aims:

1. To support brave space where participants can dare to have difficult conversations while taking care of themselves and others
2. To deepen participant awareness of self, connection with others and with system (system as profoundly unequal - connection as both potentially warming but also discomfoting)
3. To nurture ethical solidarity through action-experiments grounded in collective and self-inquiry

The programme itself was organised into 2 phases: an exploration phase (which ran from mid-March to early May, beginning with an anchoring day and continuing with peer-led and facilitated evening sessions) and an action-experiment (AE) phase (which ran from early May to mid-June).[i]

In terms of the action-experiments (AEs) and what people might ‘do’, emphasis was on discernment rather than prescription. Indeed, in terms of theme and scale (could be linked to ongoing campaigning/activism, work spaces, family members / friends / peers...) the idea was to allow action-experimenting to emerge through/from the exploration phase. Scaffolded by social cartographies and somatic/body based activity, the ‘container’ for the exploration phase was therefore very central to the programme.

In the context of current global challenges (intertwining and intensifying ecological, social, political crises), Vanessa Andreotti describes the value of this emphasis on ‘pedagogical containers’, that is, growing capacity within and between ourselves to “hold space for difficult and painful engagements without feeling overwhelmed and immobilised or demanding to be rescued from discomfort.”[ii] Stein’s work on “negative capabilities” follows a similar track. Stein makes the case for (‘negative’) capabilities that enable us to “orientate towards the unknown...and hence towards the edges of

ignorance, evoking a sense of humility and acknowledgement that the intellectual work that is needed is not to produce predetermined, universal solutions that will provide guaranteed outcomes, but rather partial, provisional responses that will enable certain possibilities, and foreclose others, even as they will not necessarily “resolve” the overarching challenges we face.” [iii]

How might such a process leave people feeling? The hope, post-Solidarity in Action, was that participants would be experiencing a new charge; transformed attitudes towards self and others; renewed visions for the kinds of education and activism spaces we are in need of (and what they ask of us); emerging capacity to be & to relate in ways that didn’t feel within reach before; a deeper awareness of entanglement with multiple and escalating global crises, and a better sense of how to face them with accountability and with heart.

It should go without saying then that we are more than delighted to see this publication come into being, conveying as it does the depth and richness of participant journeys with Solidarity in Action. It’s an important record of what people did with the time and the pedagogical scaffolds that supported them. We see the words and images contained in this publication as bright lights, encouraging us all to go further in our own work for change.

And deep thanks: To UCDVO (for the vision); to the rich medley of critical friends/ mentors and facilitators that joined along the way.

And of course gratitude to the participants of Solidarity in Action in 2021. Thank you for your authentic engagement, questioning minds and open hearts.

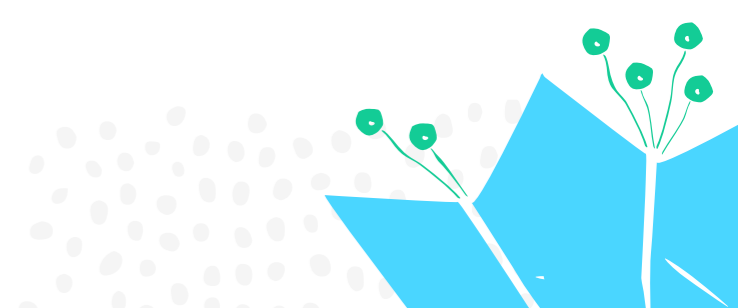
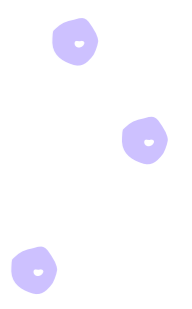
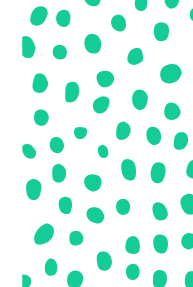
Sive Bresnihan  
Training and Education Project Officer

Comhlámh is the Irish Association of Development Workers and Volunteers in global solidarity and open to anyone interested in social justice, human rights and global development issues.

[i] The 2-part format of exploration and experimentation was inspired by Transformative Learning Journey – Tackling the root causes of global crises through education (TLJ), a training programme for educational practitioners, researchers and activists from Europe and beyond that ran from 2018 and 2020.

[ii] Andreotti, V (2021). Depth education and the possibility of GCE otherwise. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, pp.5

[iii] Stein, S. (2019). The Ethical and Ecological Limits of Sustainability: A Decolonial Approach to Climate Change in Higher Education. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 35 (3), pp. 198–212.



## Background on this Publication

This online publication comprises reflections from nine of the seventeen participants of Solidarity in Action 2021. The purpose of the publication is to capture and share some of the unique learning and impact for those involved. This publication is not a showcase of content produced during the timeframe of the course, but a space where (after its completion) participants reflected on the impact of the course in a critical and creative way. Indeed, we hope that it might provide some new impulses for those engaged in activism and for those interested in Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and transformative learning spaces.

Following completion of the course, participants were invited to submit for the publication and to consider the following prompts: your journey through the entire process and of being involved; a single theme within Solidarity in Action (e.g. education, change, connection, solidarity, learning, action); an element or moment within the process that meant a lot to you; one of the cartographies or tools or exercises; your action-experiment; something after Solidarity in Action – looking back from where you are now; or reflections on going forward.

They were invited to submit material in a wide variety of forms - essay, reflection, poetry, drawings, paintings, photos etc.

The course took place in the online space, one year into the Covid 19 pandemic - coming out of one of the longest lockdown periods in March 2021. This particular social context is a meaningful backdrop to the nature and quality of the engagement and signifies the perspective of participants at that time.

The reflections in this publication touch on the value of stories; the generative power of vulnerability; what it means to examine where we are located within matrices of power; curiosity; the collective; connection with human and other-than-human worlds and the importance of relationships. 'Solidarity' was the anchor theme of this course and was embodied in the group's engagement with each other and their communities.

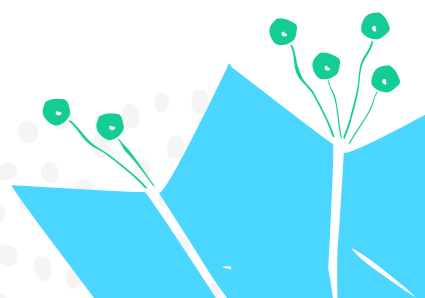
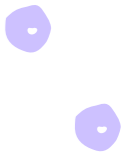
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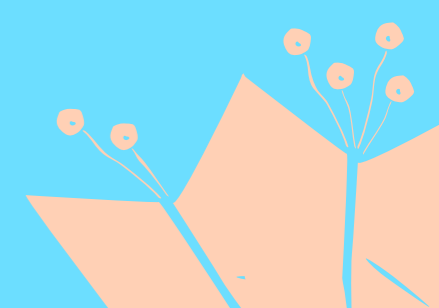
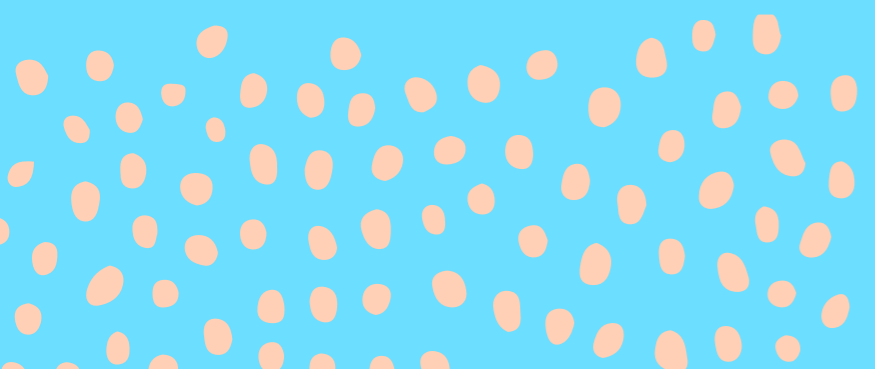
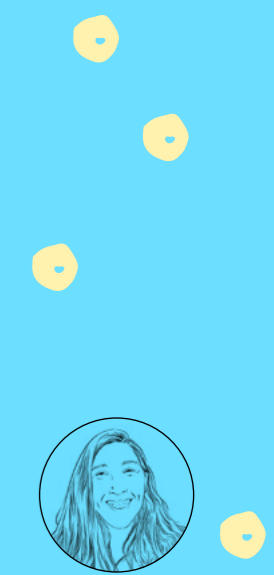
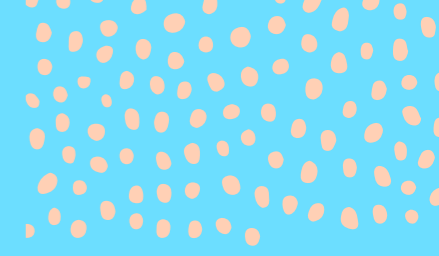
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**Giulia**







## The Action Experiment

I wanted to explore intergenerational relationships. I feel that in the Western world, we have lost/are losing the connections - and everything that comes with them - between age groups. As we have gone away from the community-type of lifestyles, where everyone supports everyone, we can see problems arising: social isolation, sadness, lack of company, etc.

I wanted to start rebuilding friendships and relationships with different age groups, especially older people. I wanted to challenge the stigma that is sometimes attached to older people (seen as boring or a burden). I wanted to broaden my social circle (with different ages) and see what could be taught and learnt.

When I reflect on this learning journey, I find it difficult at times to explain what it meant to me. I keep thinking about this question: what made it so special, so unique? I think it was the human element; I felt a lot of humanity during the sessions. I am not talking about the fact that there were humans. I am not referring to the negative connotation of humanity either. What I mean is that I could feel my peers, I could listen to their real thoughts, I could feel their emotions at times. Sometimes it felt very emotional, even overwhelming. Probably the word I am looking for is vulnerability. We were speaking from the heart, listening from the heart, all of us. It was not prepared, we never really prepared for the evenings we were going to meet. I cannot think of anything more gratifying than that. Being so vulnerable with one another. I believe that from this vulnerability, is where bravery can be found. To change things, to face them, to transform them.

I think the experience was unique to each one of us. Because it was so dependent on our own questions, our own worries, our feelings, our emotions. I believe the 'course' has hit each one of us differently. And I truly believe that that was the idea of it. Each one of us has its own direction, its own pace, its own way.

I enjoyed the fact that we were working both with body and mind. On one side, there was reflection, writing, sharing, listening. On the other side, there was consciousness, grounding, body awareness, breathing and sensory exercises. These were helpful in order to tune in with the body and align mind with body. In turn, the sessions were much more truthful - based on how we were feeling- conscious, and in the present moment.

What I keep (and will keep) really close to my heart is the connection created among the group. A sense of unity. A sense of community. A sense of belonging.

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I also remember a moment of pure joy: when we were 'dancing like nobody is watching'. That was a beautiful way to close this journey. And that relates back to being vulnerable, and creating a safe space, where we can trust each other.



I am only realising now the colourful range of resources and activities we went through during the sessions: music, clips, poetry, readings, podcasts, drawings, grounding practices, sensory exercises, rituals, breathing, body scan, dancing, shared virtual boards, social solidarity circles, stillness moments, journaling, silences, listening, speaking, expressing emotions, “travelling” to other places and spaces, and so many more.

What I learnt from those three months is that learning comes in different shapes and colours, and that action does not have to (always) happen at a big scale. Action can also take place at a small scale and have a great impact.

I would also like to mention the work from the facilitators, Sive and Gareth. They were encouraging, supporting, kind, loving, inspiring, empathic. They really made us feel comfortable, safe, and hopeful. They played a very important part of this whole journey.

I hope this short reflection can help portray a bit better what Solidarity in Action is, or at least, what it meant for me, and hopefully it will help other people have a greater sense of it too.

There is one last thing I would like to share. During one of the sessions in the exploration phase, we had to take a few minutes to write down our thoughts and emotions in a spontaneous manner. It was straight forward. We had to jot down whatever came to mind and from the heart. I found out, by doing that exercise, that the same questions kept coming back. The same themes, or worries, kept coming back. Without realising it, I wrote a sort of poem. Just to remind you: my question and the theme for my action experiment was related to intergenerational relationships (especially with people older than me). This is an excerpt of it:



**You act differently near them  
as if they knew better.**

**Always treat them with respect,  
but don't be scared to confront them.**

**Their truth is theirs.  
There is nothing to say.**

**But so is yours.  
Don't overestimate.**

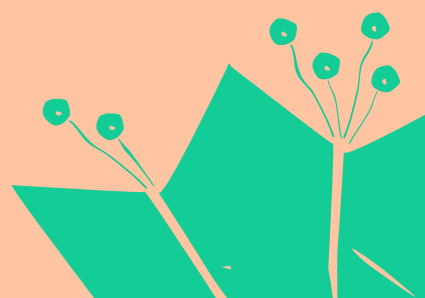
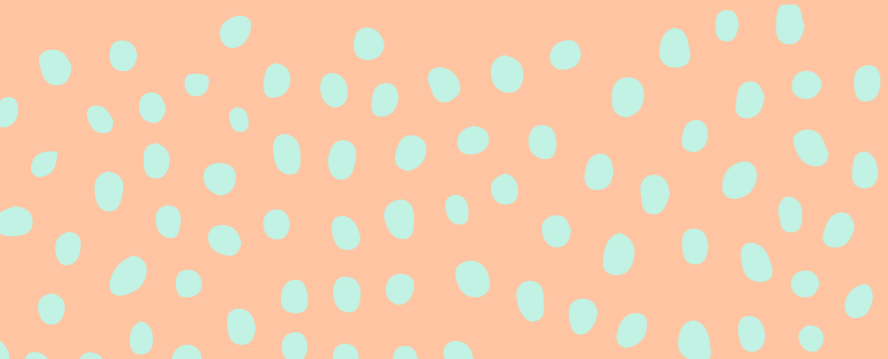
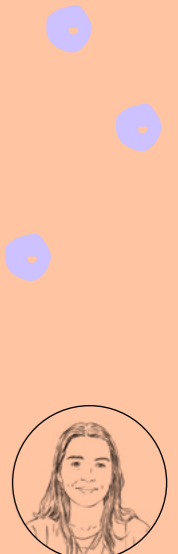
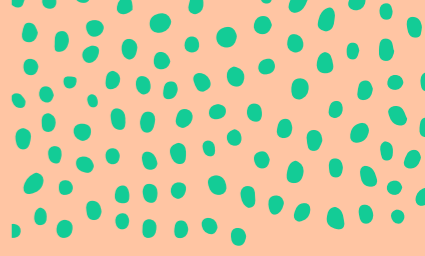
**Look right into them,  
And try to understand.**

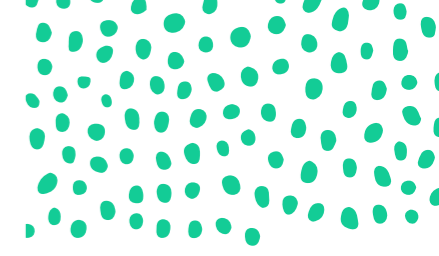






**Robert**





### The Action Experiment

I was moved by peer-led discussions we had in smaller groups where each person spoke about their potential AEs, or at least the drivers behind them being in the space so I set out to create a custom artwork for each of them based on what they had shared.

The idea was to convey their words and motives back to them as something tangible and external to themselves; to gift them something that could serve, hopefully, as a reminder of their aims even in tough times.

### The Self in Isolation

Finding meaning in isolation is difficult to do. After living through a year of lockdowns and constant uncertainty, I lost the sense of self I used to have. My sense of self changed because the context changed. A change in context, meant the ability to create meaning changed. For example, scoring a goal in a football match can be a meaningful experience. But it is only meaningful because of the context, because of the story being told around what that ball crossing that line means. Without the pitch marked out, without an opposition team and without fans cheering you on, there is no goal to be scored. You're just kicking a ball.

Living through a global pandemic and isolating in lockdown changed the context of what the world was to me. The story changed. I was no longer watching The Chase, checking sports updates and scrolling through selfies. I was watching news updates, checking death tolls, and scrolling through pandemonium. The usual rhythms and routines of life in its everyday mundanity were emptied of their bestowed meaning.

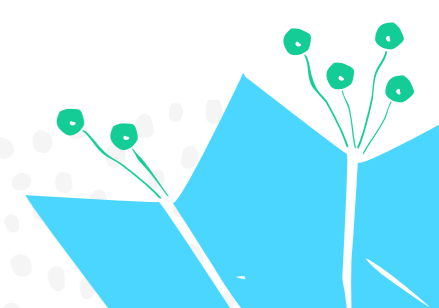
I started to reflect upon why I found certain things meaningful in the first place, and at what point I consciously opted to do so. Career status, clothes that communicate a sense of self, a religious support of football, Instagram pictures of travelling. It was a sobering experience, to be cleaved from external objects regularly used to understand an internal ideal of individuality. When contrasted with the immediacy of worry for your family and friend's health, the loss of social interaction and the context normality we lived in, the meaningfulness of everyday normal worries begin to wane.

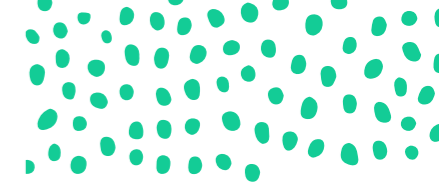
However, as much as it was harrowing to feel this way, it was also a relief to find out I was not the only one. Finding out my friends and family felt the same way about losing a sense of self was like arriving at school on a Monday morning without the homework done. You're absolutely dreading it until you find out your friends didn't do

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the homework either. You feel a relief in the sense of solidarity, despite the trouble still to come. You think, "Oh thank god, we're all fucked."

Although this might seem trivial, I think it reveals something of the importance of solidarity in establishing meaning, and more broadly how shared stories are used to





imbue meaning into events. When faced with a loss of sense alone, it has one meaning. But when that feeling is shared, it's another. The same can apply to our usual shared conceptions of what is meaningful and validated in our social circles. Posting pictures of a holiday on Instagram is fun because it is sharing with people, the meaning in the action relies on the involvement of other people. Supporting a football team and buying jerseys relies on there being other teams to root against, to make it meaningful supporting your individual team.

This idea that other people are involved in meaning making is present in many aspects of our society. The paper money is printed on isn't meaningful in itself, but because we communally agree on its meaning, it exerts a force in the world. Similarly, even if I stop my own watch from ticking, it doesn't stop the globe spinning or change the time on anyone else's watch. We are a part of communal stories and culturally held beliefs, because meaning is made socially. Our stories are the markings on the pitch that make a football crossing over a chalk line, a goal.

When applying this thought process of social meaning making to global citizenship, I wonder about the communal stories that are told, and the cultural belief system we are a part of. What if the ways in which my sense of self is sustained, and meaning is made, is detrimental to the world being an equitable, fair, and sustainable place for all its inhabitants? Are the social stories of consumerism and individuality incongruent with global citizenship? Using these stories to approach global citizenship is like throwing a dart at a board too big to miss, but too poorly demarcated to know whether it was a good shot. We can try taking action to work towards equality and the negative effects of climate change for example, but without the involvement of social and personal stories these actions can lack meaning and a sense of validity if you are uncertain of whether your actions are of any benefit or useful.

If the pandemic had a knock-on effect of detaching individuals from their sense of self, and by extension social stories, then this brings an opportunity to tell new stories and create new identities capable of acting in new ways that weren't thought of before. By changing the stories we tell of ourselves and the world we are a part of, we have an opportunity to realign our individual values with and make meaningful what is of benefit

to more than just the isolated self. Otherwise, without changing the narratives and our core beliefs about what is meaningful, we will only accomplish the appearance of change. Like getting up from your window seat on a train, only to sit on the opposite side, face the other way and watch the world go by from another direction. All the while the train still travels the same way.

### A Story of Solidarity

Participating in Solidarity in Action was an experience of being taken off the tracks. Instead of trying to mark out zones of the global citizenship dart board, we were encouraged to focus on the dart in hand. Examine what it is we're trying to do, why it is we want that, and how it is we wish to achieve it. Over the course of four months, nine

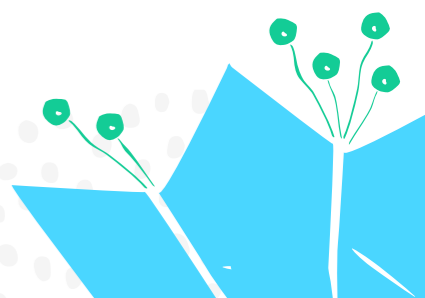
zoom calls, and one action project, seventeen participants took part. You could tell by the name, "Solidarity in Action", that the course was rooted in optimism given that we were in the middle of a lockdown. "Isolation and Atrophy" would've been apt for the time.

The openness of the action-experiment was a challenge. It was like being given a blank sachet of seeds, asked to see what grows and trust the process. There was a balance of uncertainty around what type of petals would bloom, but certainty of solidarity in nourishing the soil. It was through

the sense of place created by our online zoom sessions that this sense of solidarity was sustained so well.

These online spaces served as pauses in the noise led narrative of self and consumption. There was an untangling of the self from binds of habit and individualised forms of validation. Instead, the established space was a context "that frames, organises and anchors experience which is needed to extract meaning and construct knowledge" (Singleton). As participants, we were given reign to hold peer-lead sessions to discuss and reflect upon our aims for our action-experiment and more broadly, our roles as global citizens. The types of conversations and themes that found themselves interwoven in our discussions felt distinct, refreshing and propelling. I noticed how different my sense of self felt fulfilled by time spent inside this space, in contrast to outside the space. It was the difference between having air flow freely through your nose, and it being

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clogged completely. You have a new appreciation for your breath. The learning from our place of solidarity stayed with me beyond our time together.

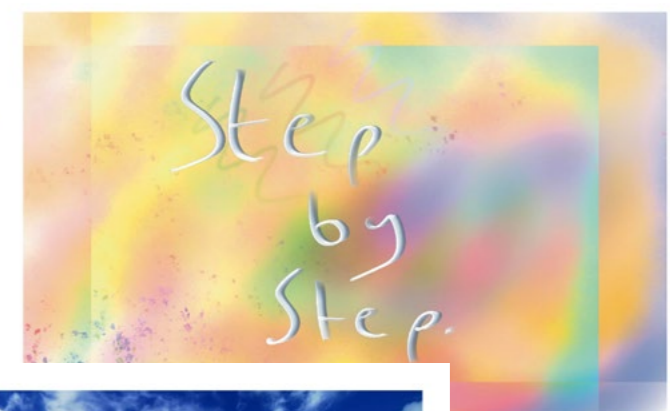
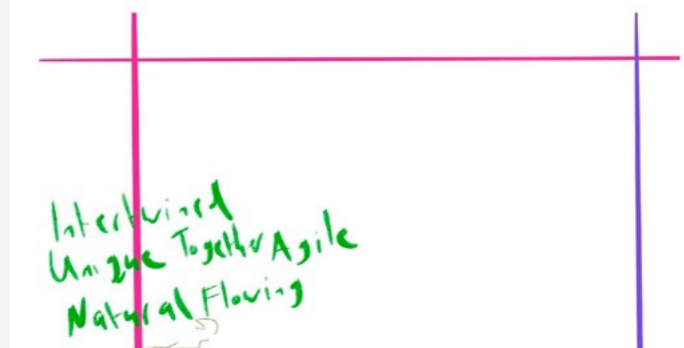
Each one of us is a part of a story. But we can also tell stories. We are protagonists with pens. Though it can feel at times as if we need to have every colour on the palate to be worthy of marking the canvas, we each have something to contribute. By creating a sense of place through unified support and allowing peer-led relationships to grow, Solidarity in Action allowed me to re-evaluate beliefs and values in an organic way. The result was a deeper reflection on the self and a chance at disentanglement from the social narratives which contradict the aims of global citizenship (Suša, 2020). Part of what is said about contributing to a fairer, sustainable world is to think globally and act locally. Solidarity in Action created a space for me to critically assess the self that wants to act locally.

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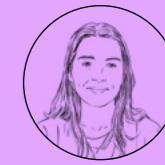
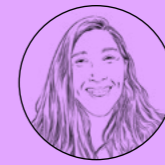
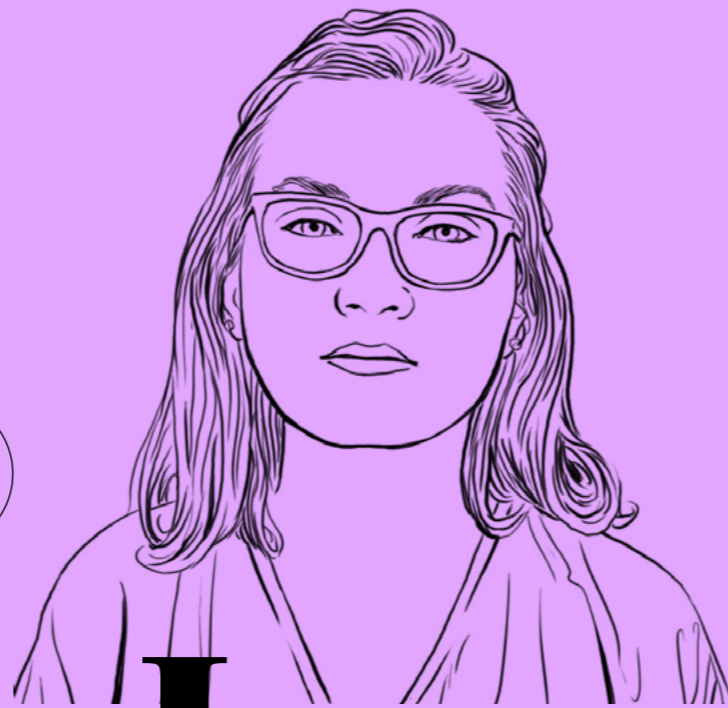
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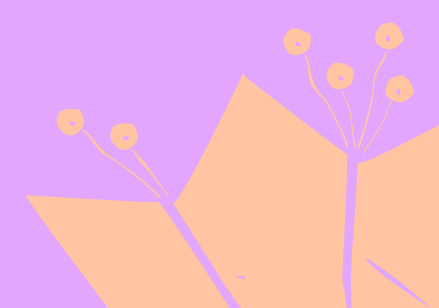
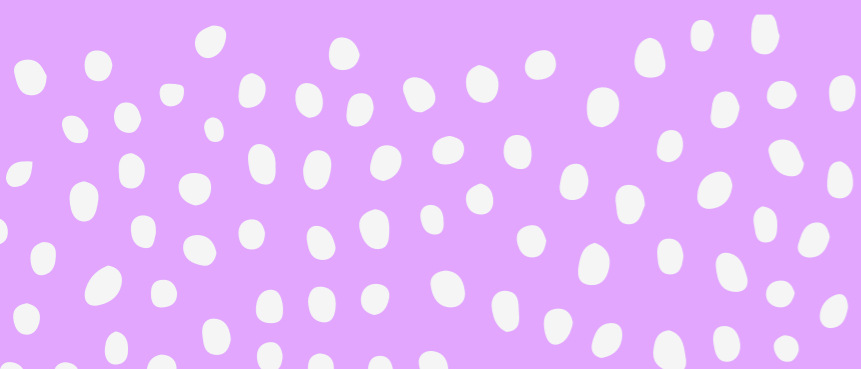
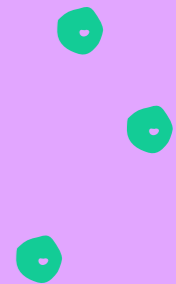
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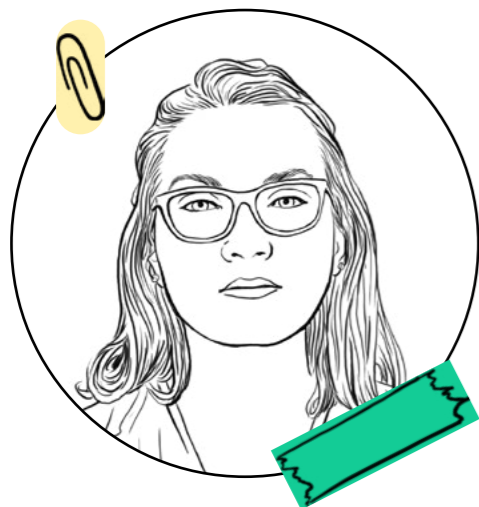
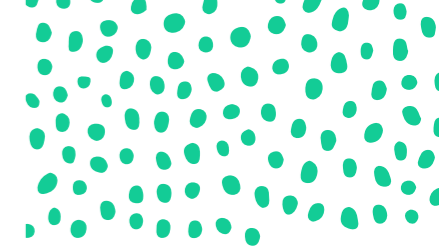
Singleton, Julie. (2015) Head, Heart and Hand Model for Transformative Learning: Place as Context for Changing Sustainability Values. *Journal of Sustainability Education*. Vol: 9.  
 Suša, Rene. (2020) Icebergs, Warning Shots and Swimming in Corona-Waters. *Transformative Learning Journeys: Venturing into the wilds of Global Citizenship Education* pp. 54 – 65. Available from: [Bridge47.org](http://Bridge47.org) [Accessed October 2021]  
 Suša, Rene. (2014) *The Stories We Tell Ourselves*. Brussels: DEEEP.





**Jess**





## The Action Experiment

I wanted to help change the company I work at's attitude to and treatment of trans, non-binary (nb), and gender non conforming (gnc) people. This included my colleague's attitudes, beliefs, pre/misconceptions about these people, the policies and codes of conduct (or, more accurately, the lack of these) we had in place regarding these people, the language we use in internal and external material... countless things. And then it changed...

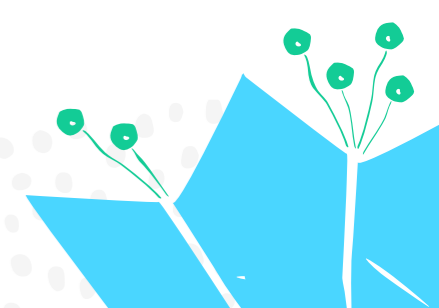
### Aithnítear cara i gcruatán

My action experiment began intentional, structured, deliberate, and above all corporate. When it shifted it kept the intentionality, but became all-encompassing and natural. My action experiment was and is and will be my life. My initial concept, to improve the company I work at's attitude towards and treatment of trans people, stayed but expanded far beyond that. I recently explained my project to an important person in my life as "Jess comes to terms with transness" because that truly was what all this was.

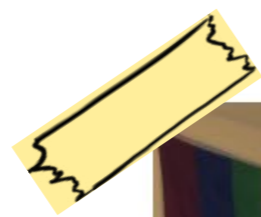
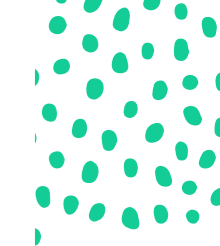
Solidarity is easiest to give to those you know fullest, and I shed the corporate, stand-offish, and distant initial action project in favour of throwing myself into the lives of the trans people I knew. I threw them into my life too. To and fro. The relationships, friendships, conversations, fights, hugs, knowing looks, tears and touches I've shared during this time have changed us for the better. We better understand myself and others, we better understand our places in this, we better understand our relationships to the structures implicated in all of this.

Most importantly I've enjoyed my life during this time. I loved the mundane and inane things we got up to, I loved the new and exciting things we did, I loved seeing them all live their lives completely and in completeness. I love living my life with them. My action experiment, was, and is, and will be my life. How could I tell you about past months of my life in a few small pixels? Here are some snippets of my life, and glances of the important people in it now and hopefully forever.

**Solidarity is easiest to give to those you know fullest, and I shed the corporate, stand-offish, and distant initial action project in favour of throwing myself into the lives of the trans people I knew.**

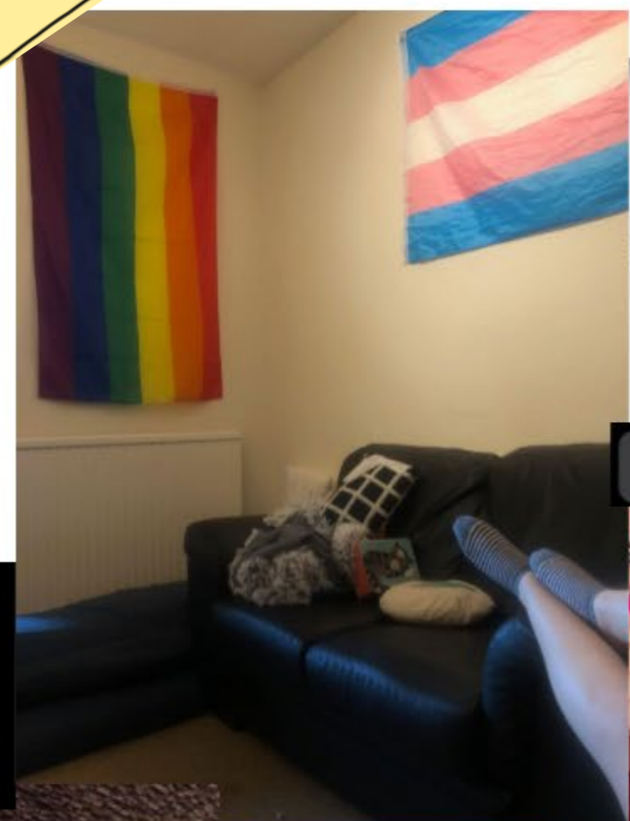






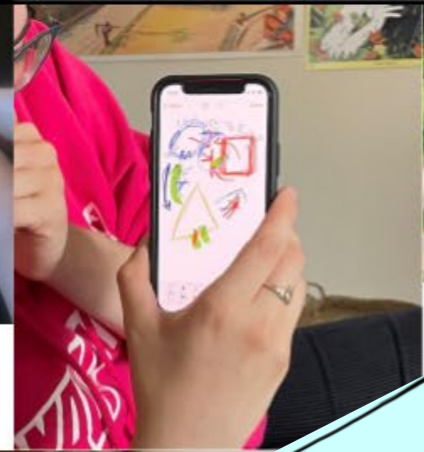
Tue, 14 Sep 2022 again  
 jess update: 5 pages into (finally) reading stone butch blues 21:46 ✓  
 Oh good luck 21:58  
 "Joe Goldberg" the teacher asked, "Present," I answered. The teacher narrowed her eyes at me. "What kind of name is that? Is it short for Jessica?" I shook my head. "No, ma'am." "How?" she repeated. "That's not a girl's name."  
 oh we already have a major oops on this one 22:01 ✓  
 i am... reading... ill say that much 22:03 ✓

this house is unhinged  
 Why? What?  
 Its just so chaotic lmao  
 What's happened? 🤔  
 replied to you  
 its just so chaotic lmao  
 I agree  
 nothing honest its just the whole vibe. everyone comes in here and does their little things and runs off again  
 It's cute  
 Like a 2nd home to half the trans people in Cambridge too

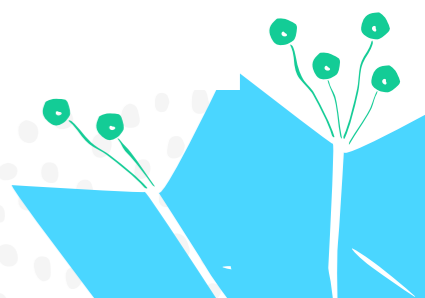


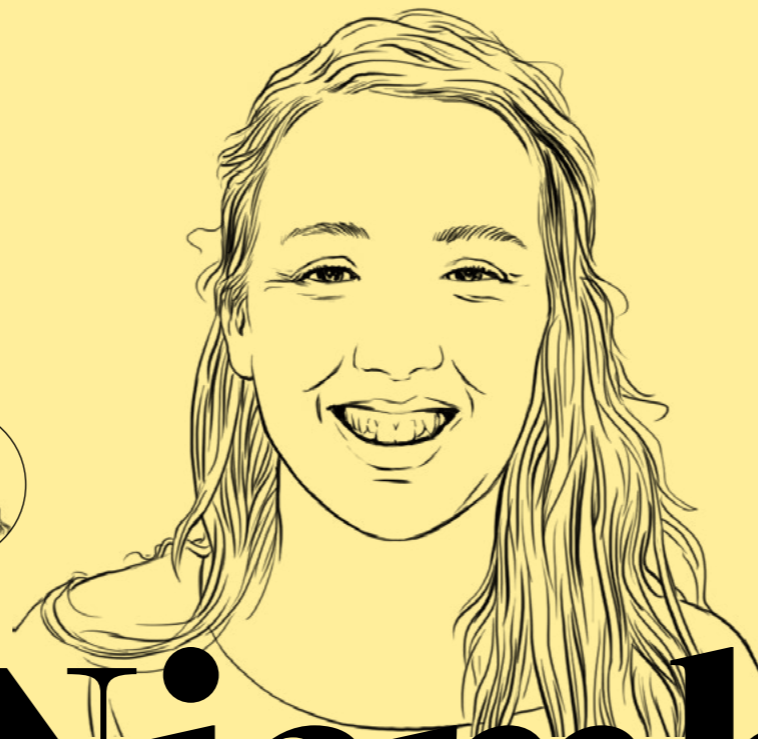
Oh babe 💕💕 solidarity lol 13:22

thank you for sending all of this to me, i know it must've taken some real courage to share your feelings like this ★ 00:32  
 its all good 00:46 ✓

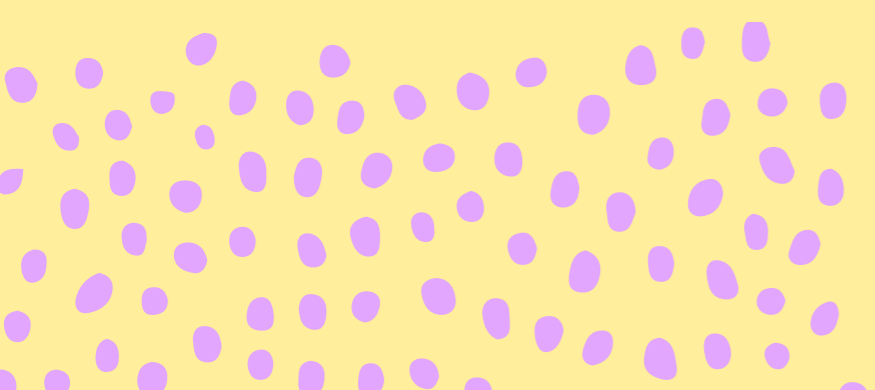
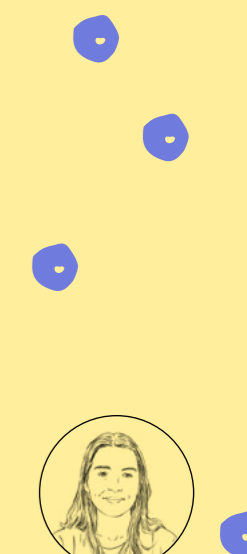


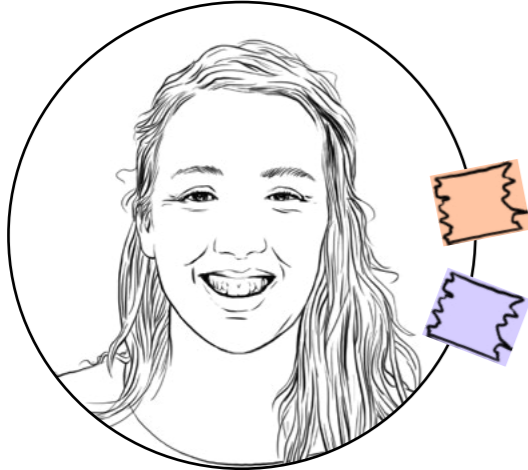
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS BEING "FAKE" QUEER/TRANS BECAUSE THESE THINGS ARE DEFINED WHOLLY BY SELF-IDENTIFICATION. IF YOU WANT TO BE QUEER OR TRANS BUT AREN'T SURE IF YOU'RE "REAL ENOUGH", CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE ALREADY THERE. THE BIG SECRET IS THAT ALMO EVERYONE IS AFRAID OF BEING "FAKE". THIS IS BECAUSE THERE IS A VERY POWERFUL IMPETUS FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD THAT WANTS YOU TO BELIEVE YOU ARE NOT QUEER/TRANS, SO THAT YOU WILL FOREGO THESE THINGS AND JUST BE "NORMAL". EMBRACING AGENCY IN BEING QUEER, TO ANY IS ONE OF THE MOST FULFILLING THINGS TO DO.





**Niamh**





## The Action Experiment

In a world where things move too fast, and I believe aren't considered to their full extent, I set out to slow down consciously and to see what impact that could have on a particular thought/question that I was having.

Although I hear this concept regularly, such as in the form of taking time to meditate or to be mindful, I was not fully convinced of its strength until I took the time to engage with an experiment myself. My hope is that you too will take on the challenge of finding nothing and see where it might lead you.

I rarely take the time to slow down and consider many of my thoughts and perspectives. My experiment was prompted by the subject area of exploring the relationship between self and collective, as well as individualism thinking and collective thinking. The experiment was to take the same question and answer it every day for 30 days. I was curious whether slowing down and taking the time to engage with the question over a period of time would bring me into a deeper thought space than previously achieved.

### The question

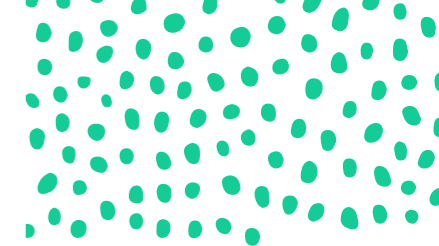
'Is it time that we make the collective a priority over the self, what would that look like? And if so. How would we go about it? or is it time that we focus on the self as a means for contributing to the collective? And if so how would we go about it?'

Followed by the sub-questions; 'What are the attributes and deficits of either / or?', 'What is missing from this question/conversation?'

The question was chosen not for finding an answer, but rather for exploring the 'grey space' or the cognitive dissonance that exists in the crosssection of many arguments. I believe this in-between space is of great importance to developing a deeper understanding and can be shied away from due to the lack of closure found there.

**My hope is that you too will take on the challenge of finding nothing and see where it might lead you.**





## My journey went as follows



Day 1-15, brought excitement, confusion, surprise, challenge, overwhelm, anxiety, interest, business, high energy, fruitful thought, and necessary realisations. Exploration of ideas in my own physical and mental space as well as engaging in further exploration of other people's spaces and the wider world: ranging from historical media footage to contemporary sports coverage.

Day 15, the halfway point, brought a shift in my thoughts. I noticed that I began questioning more and my pace slowed. My mind began to slow and I was unsure if I was going to have the ability to keep up the consistent daily reflections.

Day 15-21, new spaces and new ideas began to appear; by relaxing the pressure I had felt in the first half of the experiment to "be good" at the experiment, and after the emptying of my mind through the 'download' of thoughts that had occurred through journaling.

Elaborating on the above in more detail, during the initial exploration phase (Day 1-15) my mind began to clear the hundreds of thoughts and ideas which I had backlogged around this concept. This resulted in the creation of space to hold and reflect on thoughts. I became more aware and open to new thoughts and ideas that were surfacing slower, and I began to acknowledge and give time to thoughts that previously may have been dismissed or over-ridden consciously or subconsciously. It was at this point that although I was sitting for a while and felt I was thinking of nothing, the most interesting thoughts began to surface.

Day 21-25, I needed time to process the deeper thoughts which began to occur and so my journal pages were becoming less full of thoughts, it was difficult to feel as if I was producing 'nothing'. I found it hard to journal those days as I feel that we are programmed to produce content or thoughts on a regular basis and perhaps are not

allowing the time for processing and letting thoughts sink in. I feel that society has less and less time for doing 'nothing'. I began to move into a more reflective state which showed itself in the final days.

Day 25-30, showed me solace, peace, and acceptance. I began to feel content to sit with 'not knowing the answer' and accepting the complex nature of the cross-section of many of the arguments which occur in society today. I learned to be ok with the discourse and cognitive dissonance which was occurring for me. I gained an understanding of why the complex is necessary. Reoccurring themes which resonated with me throughout the journey began to make themselves clear. The mental capacity I gained throughout the process, gave me space to identify emerging patterns in my thought space.

### Some learnings and insights that I uncovered:

The power of connecting with others, the energy that flows between people, the isolation that people feel while not with their tribe.

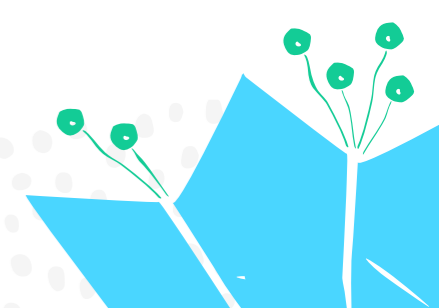
The power that belonging has on influencing who you are, and the actions you take.

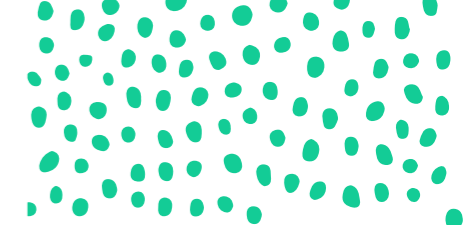
That the influences outside of me and the many communities I am a part of, influence my exploration of self.

Are the self and collective even different at all? What defines them? What is the relationship between 'self' & 'collective'? The idea of self and collective became intrinsically linked in my mind, one was nothing without the other. They are potentially so interconnected and woven together that I began to wonder if perhaps, it is more about how we look at things/our perspective as opposed to the actual definition of either one part or the another.

**The question was chosen not for finding an answer, but rather for exploring the 'grey space' or the cognitive dissonance that exists in the crosssection of many arguments.**

Although every 'thing' can be named as separate, book, bag, human, tree, planet, etc... energy is flowing/transforming through all of these objects in the collective space of the universe and so you can see all of these objects as separate or you can see their shared nature at an anatomical level as a collective.





Above: Figures 1,2,3: We are not closed circuits, but rather ones in which energised particles move and flow between.

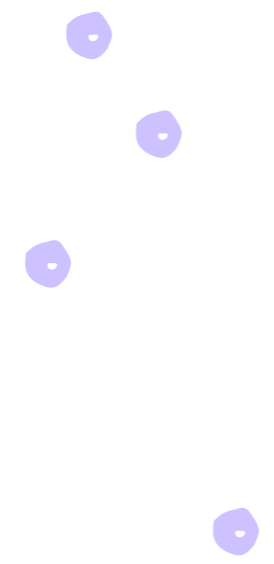
**Some deeper insights gained from the process itself:**

I believe the quest behind this endeavour was to slow down and see how this affects my ability to interact with a topic or subject matter. What I was really drawn to was how each of us makes decisions based on our perception of this topic, while identifying as either an individual or part of a collective.

I believe if we are more aware of our interconnectedness then we would be more conscious of our actions as a whole, and the shared pain/discomfort that we can all, both, cause and feel.

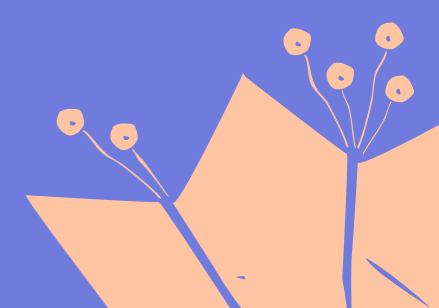
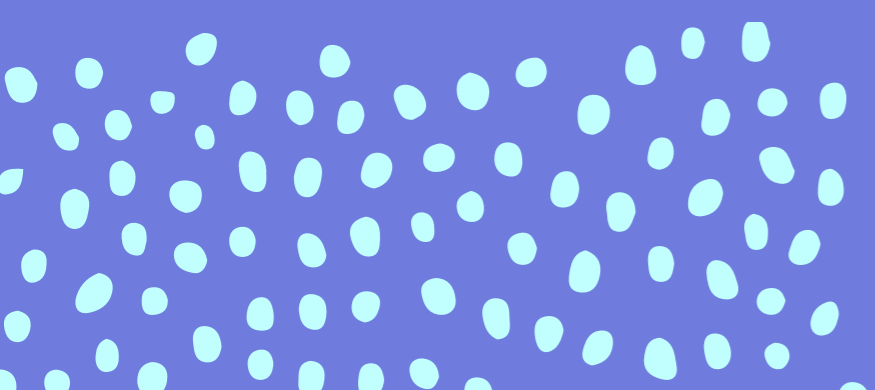
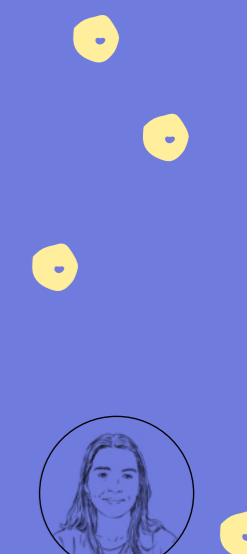
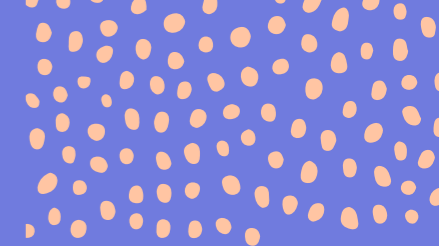
My original question before it was developed was ‘How do we create unity while also respecting and embracing individuality?’. I learned that these two things don’t have to be in conflict at all. In fact, I think that the idea of a thriving collective is one in which all people can express themselves without fear of harm or prosecution, with an inner guiding compass that their actions of freedom don’t harm or injure another. Unity to me is a common goal, of a safe and secure environment where no one person or group is exploited for the gain of another. As an advocate, my goal is to increase awareness of our interconnectedness as opposed to direct or influence any person’s thoughts in a specific direction or towards a specific outcome.

I learned that in order to reach this level of reflection I needed to learn how to do ‘nothing’. I encourage you to push through the initial urge to pick up a smartphone, or turn on the tv, or walk too fast because perhaps we may not know it but all of those time fillers or distractions redirect our attention from doing nothing and block us from the very best something, which is just beyond nothing.

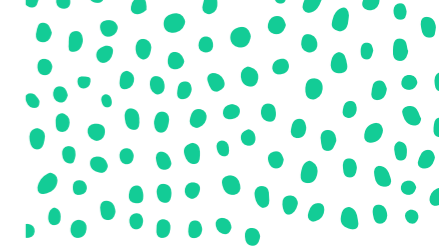




**Róisín**







## The Action Experiment

The Solidarity in Action space generated recurring questions around how I engage with the people who are fundamental to my understanding and position in the world, but also the people with whom I was currently sharing space. This led me to my Action-Experiment which explored questions around privilege, entitlements, “meaningful” work and inter-generational wealth through a dialogue/interview process with my parents.

The ideas we explored during the ‘Solidarity in Action’ process and the vulnerability people in our group showed blew me away. I saw the ideas and questions as a demand to think more critically about how I view work, the nature of my relationships, and how I engage in volunteering and activism. I started to understand action as more complicated, less linear and often not “visible”. I loved the ideas--exploring scales, social cartographies, entanglement--and how they sounded. But I realised that there was a kind of safety in their abstractness.

The importance of relationships to building solidarity, and in social justice work in general, was reiterated again and again, in the content and our discussions as a group. I sensed that this was supposed to make me feel hopeful. In contrast, it really challenged and intimidated me because of a pervasive feeling of incapacity to create change in my relationships, especially with my parents. It did not feel abstract. Like many people I have old friends and family members who are attached to different ‘theories of change’, and some who think we, in the Global North, can continue to occupy the inflated position we currently

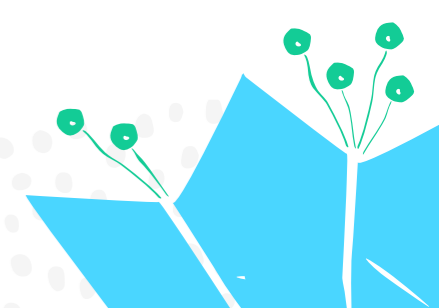
hold in the world. In some relationships I have avoided engaging with this disconnect, but I increasingly feel as though this is more about a fear of discomfort than respect for our differences. In retrospect, I think I was drawn to a sense that the Action-Experiment could be a way of “dealing with” or “sorting out” things that felt uncomfortable in my life.

**Hearing people’s stories is hard, you can no longer generalise about or reduce their experience, especially when you begin to listen and recognise the echoes.**

I started to have conversations with my parents. I planned some questions that aimed to draw out their stories and experiences, but mostly it was just conversation. I wanted to understand what their lives were like in their 20s; what did they dream of, what scared them, what change did they hope for.

It seems obvious now, that I was looking for guidance and understanding in their experience. They told stories of what they describe as a kind collective sense of hopelessness and shame in 1980s

Ireland. The experience of work, the meaning and purpose it gave them, but also the intensity they felt. My Dad recalled a Christmas party early in his career, his sense of disillusionment and disbelief in witnessing his older colleagues drink pints and have a good time (on Christmas Eve!) while the economy of the country was failing.





An intensity that surfaced again in the deep sense of guilt and implication he felt as an economist and civil servant working in the aftermath of 2008. Interestingly, alongside the deep commitment they showed to their work and colleagues, they spent years apart after marrying, communicating mostly by letters. My mum remembers ringing Heuston station to let my Dad know, over the station loudspeaker, that he had got a job offer.

Their friendships seemed less significant than mine do now, or their expectations of them less, and the attention they gave their emotional lives was limited. When I asked who they relied on, with whom did they share, they both struggled to answer. Some stories were harder to hear than others.

Hearing people's stories is hard, you can no longer generalise about or reduce their experience, especially when you begin to listen and recognise the echoes. I think I wanted some reassurance. I want to live differently, and maybe with a different kind of awareness, but I also know I have some of that intensity, internalising and even ambitious nature that they exhibited, and it makes me uncomfortable. I also see them now scramble a bit to justify and defend--in explicit and implicit ways--the privileged life they now live; both public servants, committed to their work and Irish society, both with personal struggles. What I initially saw as a disconnection from the idealism, intensity and political lens of their youth, started to seem more like a sense of lostness, a struggle to understand what their contribution, and action, might be in retirement.

I think the most challenging aspect of this process, in engaging with intentionality and purpose, was realising that it might require me to change how I interact with them on an everyday basis. If they were going to share in this way, I might have to reciprocate. I hoped to "address" certain topics, and separate the emotion I might feel around them.

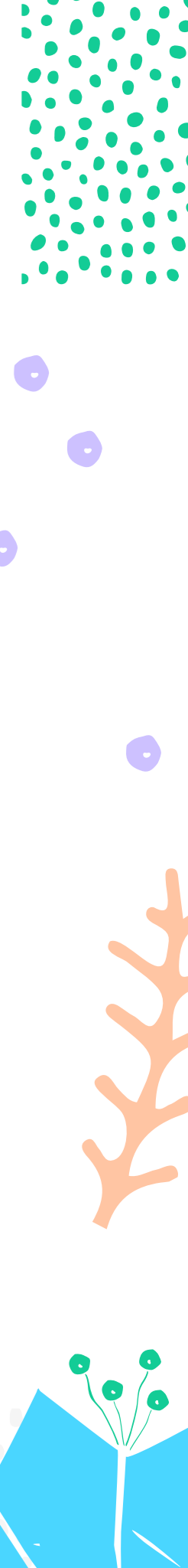
But there was something about sitting down across from them with intention and curiosity that shifted the energy between us. That shift in energy also meant I couldn't really keep out the emotion I felt, including my fear and uncertainty about the future.

One evening we agreed to have a conversation about change and their experience of it over time. I knew I wasn't in the right headspace and felt a walled-up feeling inside my chest from the beginning. That energy provoked questions and answers that were like

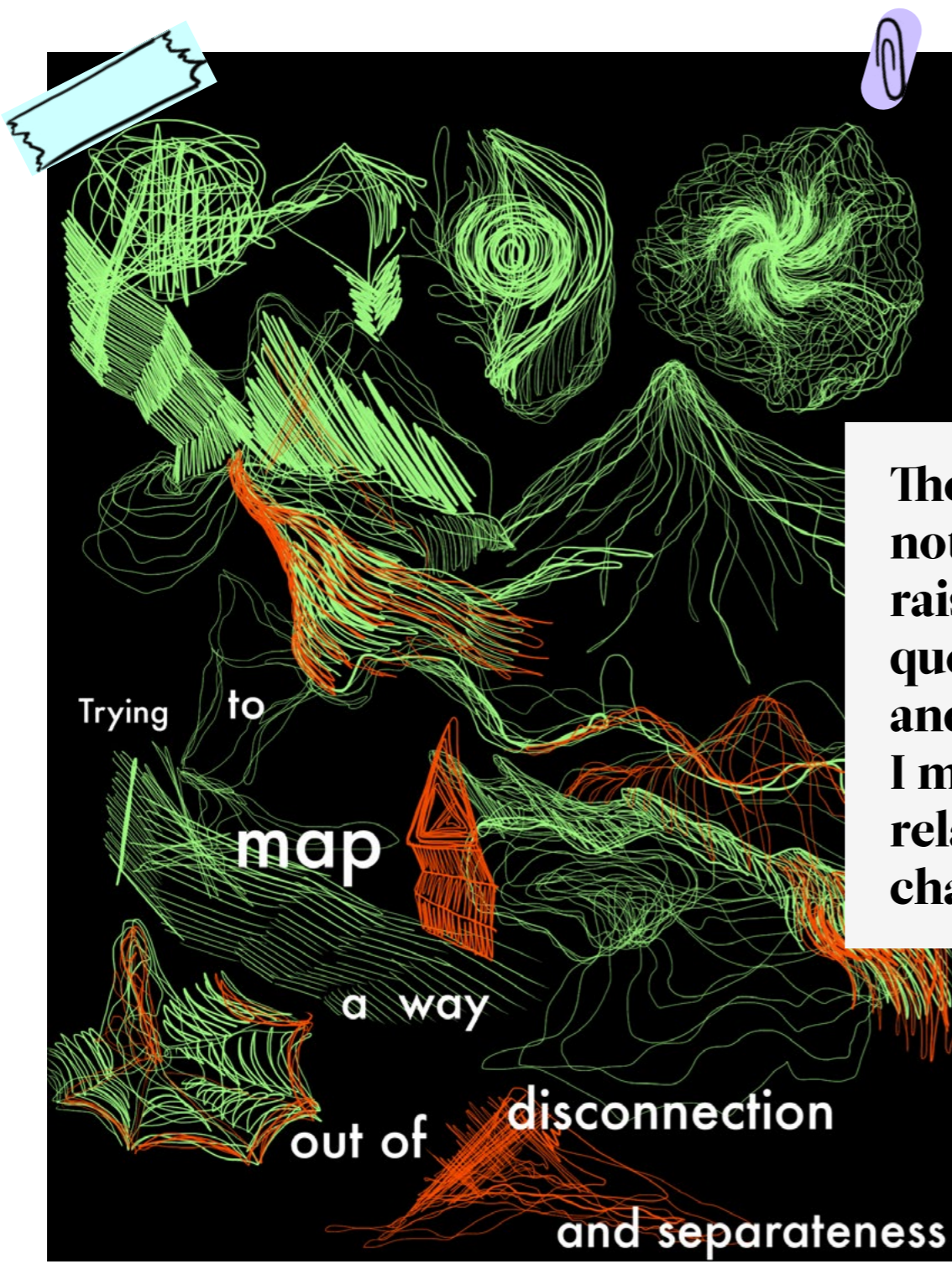
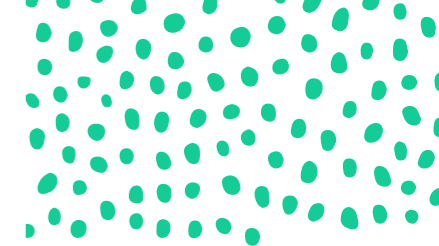
missiles. When I expressed my doubts about studying more, they were clearly alarmed, and intimated that they hoped it would enable me to do more "meaningful work". Both of them shifted in their seats when I asked them to define what they meant by "meaningful work". We kept falling, and suddenly I was crying about "climate change". At its core this conversation was not different from the others; I was exploring and trying to understand, with them, ways in which we might live different lives, by choice and necessity, while recognising that desire to please, and in some ways emulate them, was still there. It suggested how easily language can fail us and our relationships, but also that sometimes we might not be able to engage in these conversations.

The process stopped after that conversation because I think I felt exposed, and was realising that the more we did this, the more vulnerable I would have to be. It was in the "failure" of the process that I saw I was seeking a relationship with them, in part, to process how unsure I am about the role I can or should play as someone who is privileged in numerous ways. The discomfort of the privileged should not be of primary concern, but the process raised lots of interesting and important questions for me about how I engage in, and what I bring to, conversations and how I might increase my capacity for building relationships that are honest, curious and challenging.

**There was something about sitting down across from them with intention and curiosity that shifted the energy between us.**

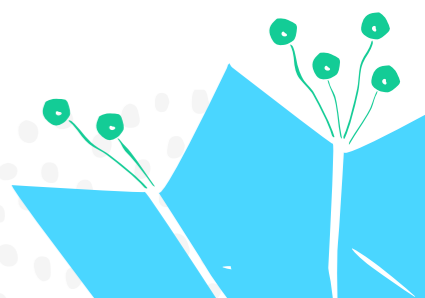






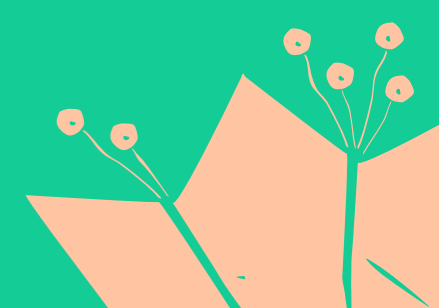
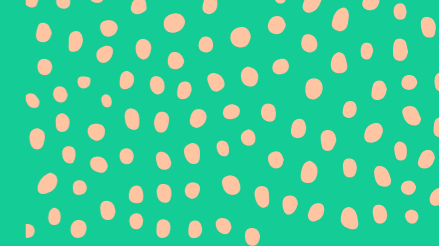
**The discomfort of the privileged should not be of primary concern, but the process raised lots of interesting and important questions for me about how I engage in, and what I bring to, conversations and how I might increase my capacity for building relationships that are honest, curious and challenging.**

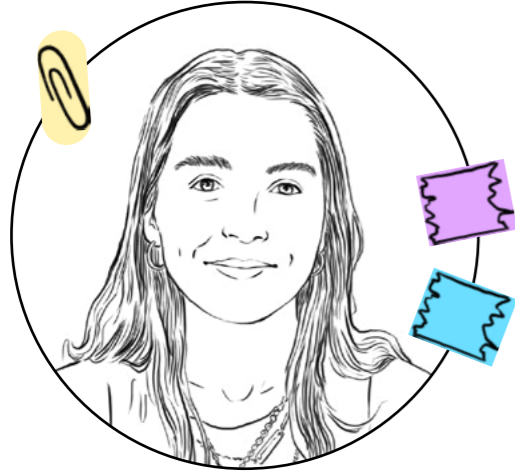
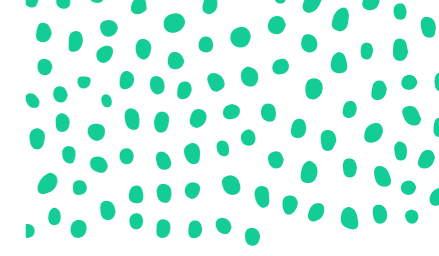
Image: Róisín O'Donnell





# Seánagha





## The Action Experiment

I set out to explore the idea of restorative self-regulation in the context of my work in the frontline community development/ social care sector. So often the health of workers gets side-lined in the process of caring for others. I wanted to create chances for more honest and open conversations about this and about the importance of well being, health and healing for those who work daily in stressful and emotional environments.

It's been some time since the group last met and I've often found myself thinking about my journey as a Solidarity in Action participant.

When I signed up for the course back in March 2021, I was in between jobs (aka jobless) in tandem with questioning my entire career trajectory. It was also the depths of what seemed like an endless lockdown and I had just moved to a new city away from the network that had been keeping me together throughout the toughest parts of the pandemic. I was living in this bizarre limbo. When I saw a post on Instagram about the course, I emailed the staff in UCDVO for additional information. I was taken aback at how encouraging and supportive the response was. This meant a lot to me at the time because, as I recall, I had received two job rejections that day. The email I received from UCDVO also made me reflect on my journey with them and by default Comhlámh.

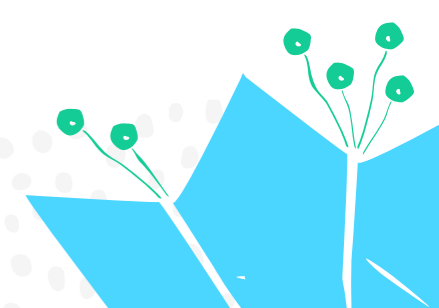
My time volunteering with UCDVO was supported by an environment where I felt like I mattered and was surrounded by like minded people in a safe space. I was immediately sold by the email response and signed up. During such a period of uncertainty, personally as well as globally, it was nice to be looking forward to some familiarity in a space that I knew I would feel supported.

I remember logging onto the Zoom on a random Tuesday evening in April and not expecting to see so many familiar faces. I went into the course still not knowing what to expect but I figured from having done courses with Comhlámh in the past all

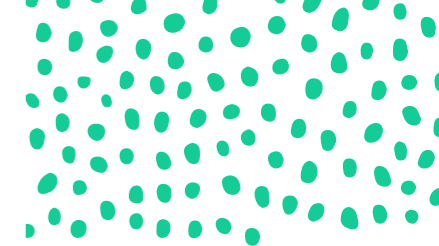
would be okay. After the first introductory session, I began to stress about the 'Action Experiment' - I mean what is an Action Experiment? I think, looking back, that was the point. Over the next few weeks I would come to the realisation that it's okay to not have a plan, it's okay to not fully know the direction of an Action Experiment, it's okay to change your thoughts and ideas last minute and it's okay to not have a clue what is going on in general. Looking back at the course I got so much from it, to the point whereby I would

**I concluded that I will always be working on my Action Experiment. That it is a life long 'to be continued', which is reassuring.**

say it was a personal journey. Solidarity in Action created a space where I felt heard and most importantly, validated.







The time allocated to the Solidarity Circle (peer led meet-up) was hugely impactful for me and my thoughts. The group kept me grounded, gave necessary perspective and support. I cannot express enough gratitude for my group - they really helped shape the Action Experiment and to challenge my 'default' way of thinking for the better. In addition to this, the conversation with my mentor was a huge source of encouragement, legitimising the direction of thought in relation to the Action Experiment. I finally let go of mental barriers that were holding me back from writing what was really important to me. I really just followed my head and heart when it came to writing the Action Experiment. I was writing to find my truth and, as abstract as that sounds, I think that's what I achieved - a slice of peace in this world.

Since this experience, I have genuinely taken every lesson I learned and applied it to my life, particularly if I am at a crossroads or feel weighed down by stress. In addition to the final write up of the Action Experiment, I concluded that I will always be working on my Action Experiment. That it is life long 'to be continued', which is reassuring.

I am very thankful for this experience and will carry that gratitude with me for life.

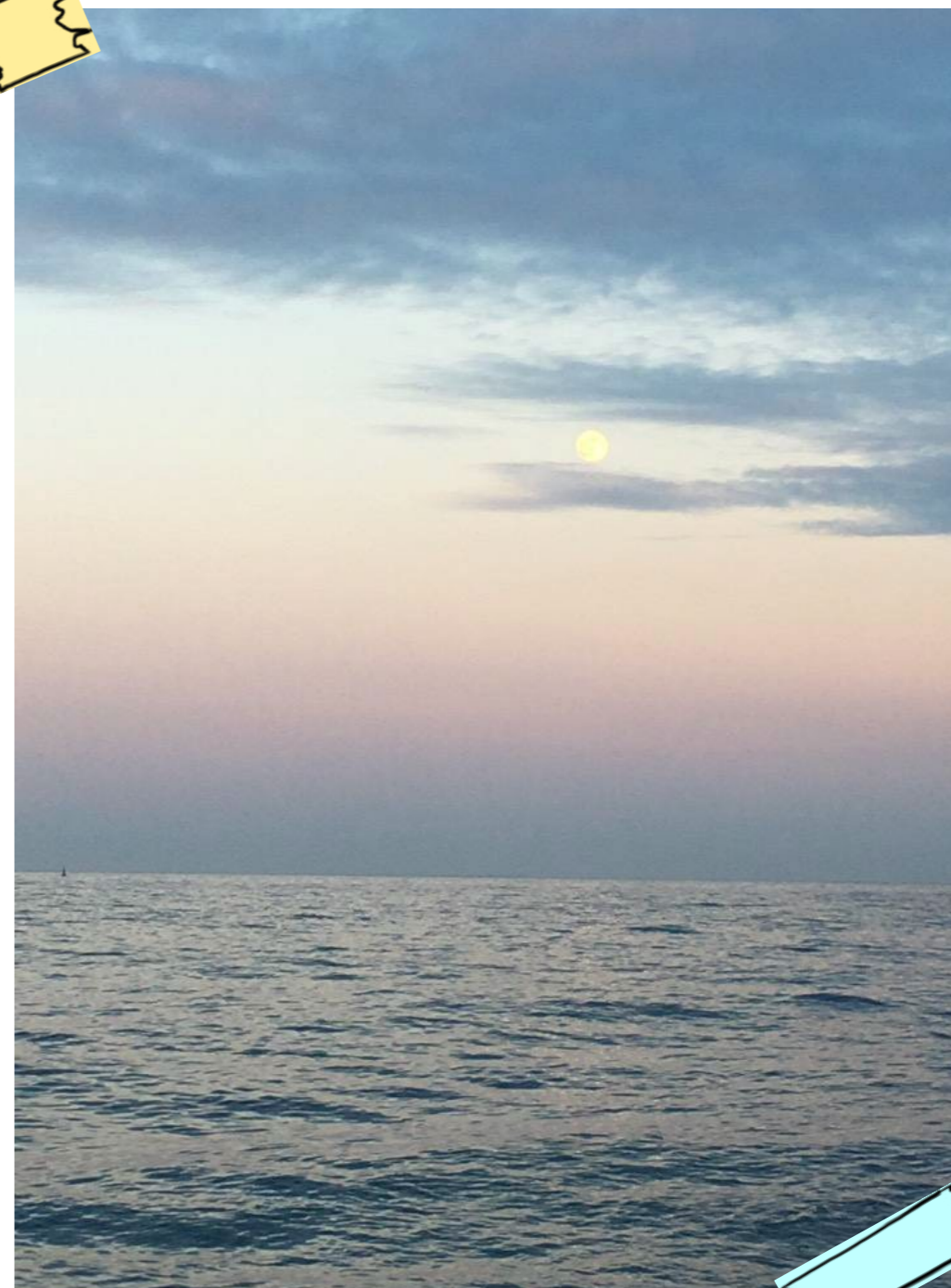
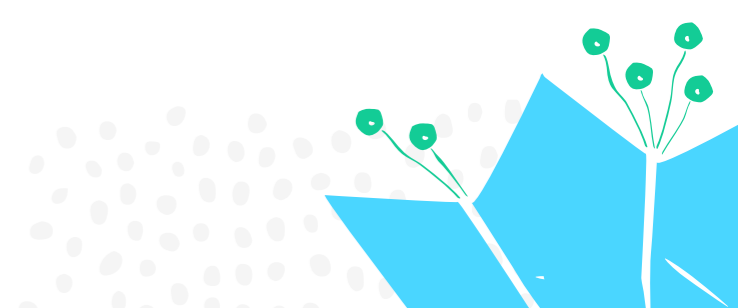
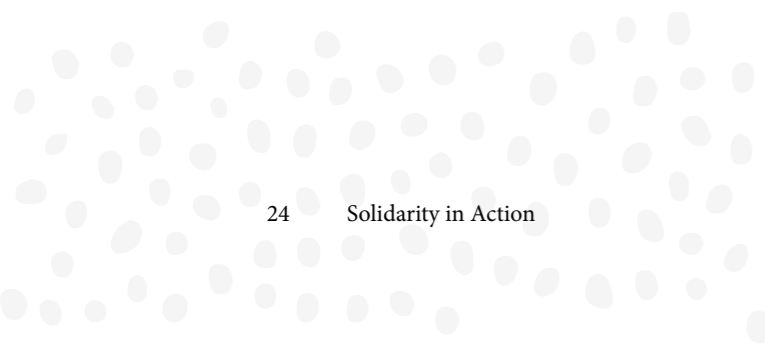


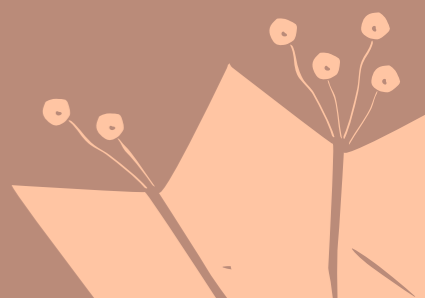
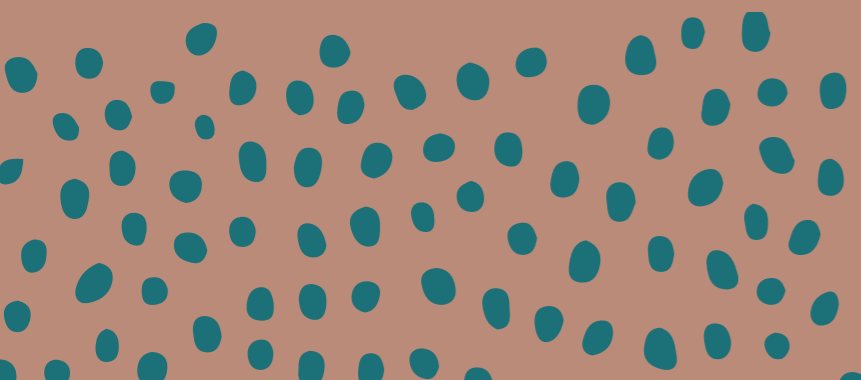
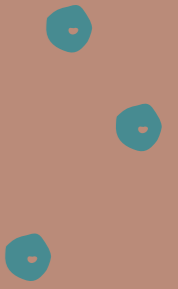
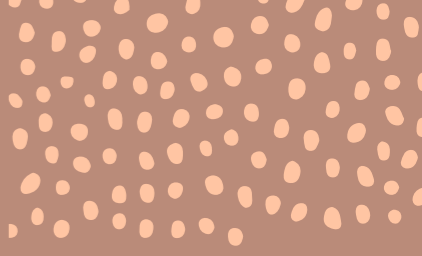
Image: Seánagh Fitzpatrick

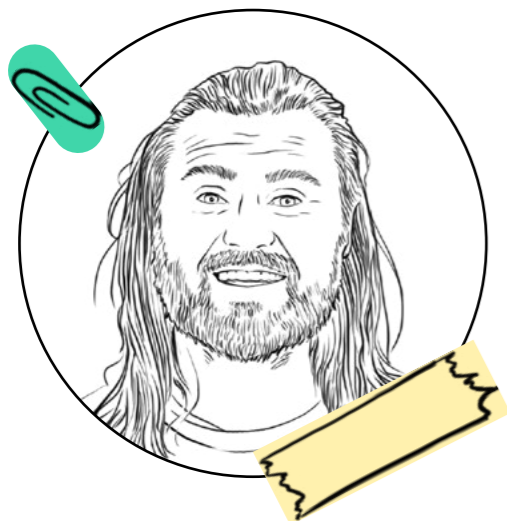
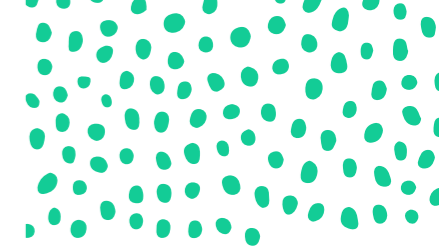






# Thomas





## The Action Experiment

I looked back on my journey through studying economics and set out to have discussions with others who had studied economics like me and were working in economics jobs now. One of the main talking points I was interested in was, “is equality at the heart of economics or is it an afterthought?” I wanted to look at my journey and other graduates’ journeys through an economics/justice lens.

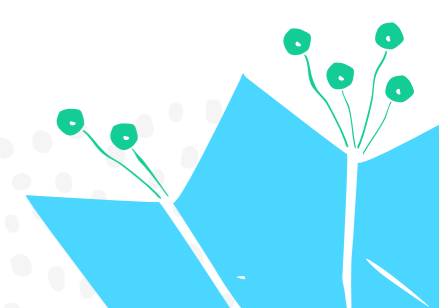
The Solidarity in Action course provided us with the means to explore our lives in action, looking for possible ways to transform current situations to best advantage ourselves, people around us and people in society but to also look within ourselves and reflect.

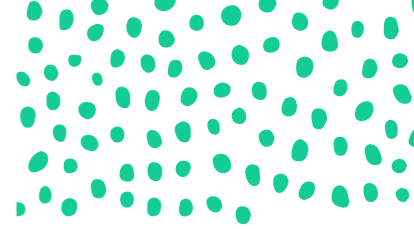
I currently work as an economist and I studied economics in university. The Solidarity in Action course made me evaluate inequality and the lack of focus on inequality as a core part of our economic studies. There are many discussions in the United Kingdom and the United States on the lack of focus on inequality in economic courses in University. Wendy Carlin an economist in England argues that inequality is often not taught and considered as an afterthought in economic courses at 3rd level. Carlin has produced a free economic textbook and course that puts inequality at the centre of the teaching to teach students about inequality in the context of studying economics. The course outlines that inequality is largely down to where you are born, who your parents are and your gender. Well-designed policies and institutions can reduce inequalities without lowering living standards but there has to be a greater understanding of inequality at every level.

As part of the action experiment, I initiated a discussion with four other graduate economists working in various types of organisations, public, private, consultative. I asked them to consider inequality and how it was approached in college and now in their current work situations. The other economists and I took the Wendy Carlin course and reflected on our experiences of taking the course. Some interesting observations came about

from our online discussions. Everyone in the group felt that there had been a lack of focus on inequality in their studies of economics. Two members of the group felt they had a greater understanding of inequality from taking modules in Development Economics. However, these modules were only optional and were not part of the core courses. Those who took the optional modules felt that there was a lot of emphasis put on understanding the key indicators of inequality rather than talking about solutions and barriers to reducing inequality.

**I believe there was a realisation that economics should not just operate within the world of numbers and figures but needs to recognise the deep and lasting impact of equality.**





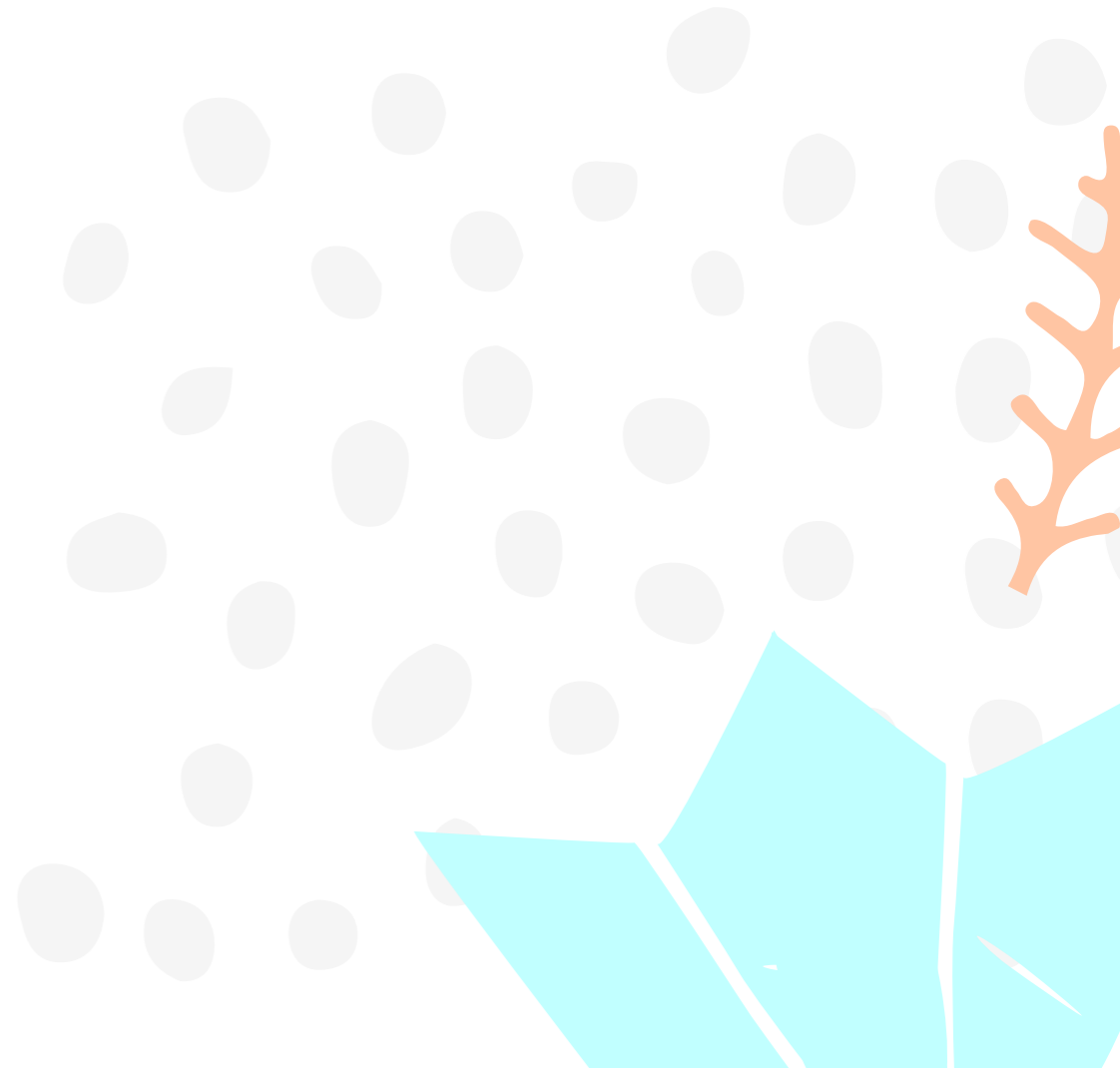
The feedback from the group by taking the Wendy Carlin course was very positive. There was a feeling that it was a course that would hugely benefit students studying economics. Furthermore, the group felt that the organisations we work for as economists needed to take more learnings from issues discussed in economic inequality research. Many felt that their organisations needed to do more to help reduce economic inequality and that their organisations ought to have clear mandates around the type of work and research they needed to deliver. I believe there was a realisation that economics should not just operate within the world of numbers and figures but needs to recognise the deep and lasting impact of equality.

This broader outlook incorporating different approaches was further emphasised during the solidarity in action sessions when we looked at a theories of change table. The table provided 6 possible approaches to addressing the current global crisis. There were various approaches from focussing on poverty to injustices to sustainability. The one approach that I delved into later with my economist group was the barriers to growth approach. The solution to the global crisis with this approach was that people only act and care for economic interests. Science and technology advancements will be the catalyst for solving the crisis and people need to adapt to the changing economy by getting training which will help expand markets and foster growth.

This idea of growth and barriers to growth holding back countries and the global economy is a topic that is discussed a lot in economics. However, looking at this approach in the table with the group we agreed that this was the most different compared to others and the most conflicting with the goals of the other approaches. Focusing on growth to determine success and using metrics to measure growth such as how many goods and services were produced i.e. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) completely takes out the human element of what it means to have a successful economy. Growth and specifically GDP does not measure the rate of poverty, the standard of living, the health of the citizens, the carbon footprint of the country and does not take into account the type of goods and services produced. Despite all these obvious flaws in GDP and the overreliance on economic growth it is still the metric that countries and governments focus the most on.

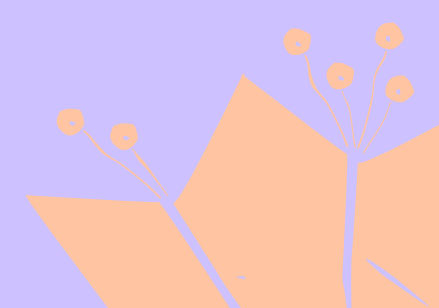
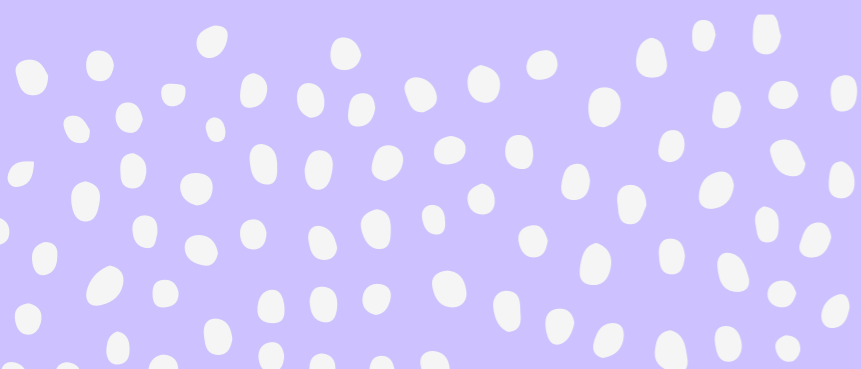
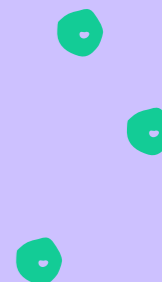
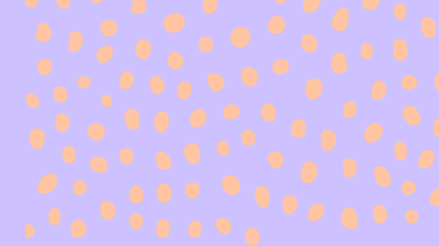
Focusing on growth at the top and hoping that it trickles down fairly to everyone is not working. The flaws of GDP are highlighted in economic textbooks and alternatives are provided. However, there is no discussion of how the alternatives might be placed at the centre of government thinking and how GDP becomes less of a focus.

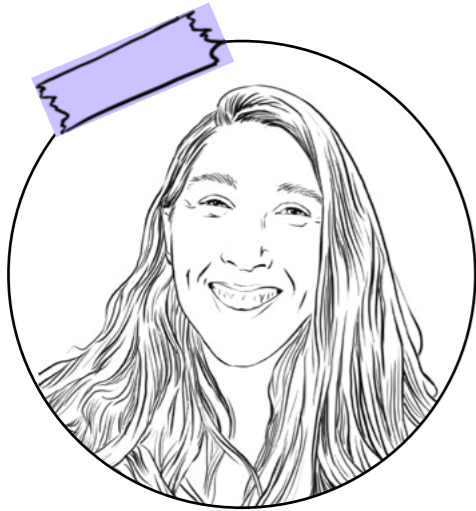
Without a change in mind-set to move away from a global economy and to look at alternatives, it will be extremely difficult to solve the global crisis. The solidarity in action course helped me to reflect on current situations and to look in a non-judgemental way on the problems and possible solutions to the global crisis.





**Tracey**





## The Action Experiment

I set out to cultivate awareness and appreciation of the relational nature of being, with an aim to acknowledge the composition of moments and extend an open heart and mind towards the relations in that moment, including holding reactions, impressions and states of mind in question, to appreciate the generative potential of the constellations comprising each moment.

### An opportunity to love

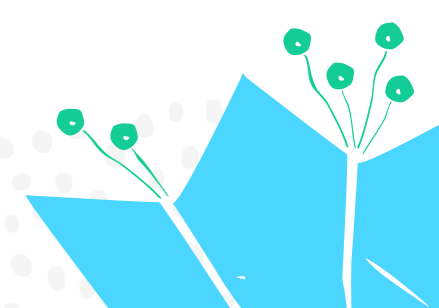
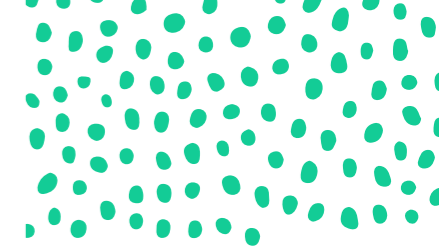
Today I have an opportunity. An opportunity to do the “right” thing. Right not because of what the result might be, but because of what my feeling about doing that thing is. Right because I feel it in my body to be so, because I feel warm about that action, I feel connected to the Earth and all that live on it when I consider that action, right because it gives me a sense that it is ok to be alive. More than ok. It is joyful to be alive. That is how I know that this is the right thing to do. And this opportunity presents itself every day.

If I were aware of it, I probably have this opportunity every single moment. Because this is an opportunity that presents itself every time I am conscious of making a choice. And if I cannot find this opportunity, it’s likely I’m not yet aware of all the options – I have another opportunity – that of being creative. I don’t always believe this, especially where there doesn’t seem to be any “right” thing to do, where the choices available all feel like a struggle, all reinforce my long-held perspective that life is innately difficult. But I am practising.

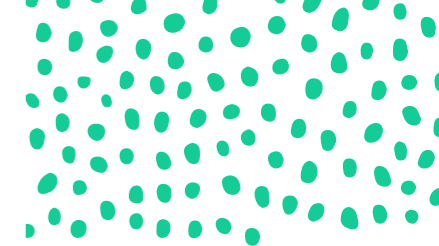
This is the gift that Solidarity in Action has given me – space to develop this practice of awareness and giving voice, within myself, to my personal code of ethics, independent of the data and models and context-dependent evidence that can so often lead to despair about the “best” thing to do instead of clarity about what is appropriate to do, in the moment of choice. Solidarity in Action has offered me a community-based cradle to develop a global appreciation of the beauty and bounty of life, and all those that share it, including myself as part of this immense network of living things. My personal project, a commitment to jointly

practising loving kindness and cultivating ecologically appropriate plant life around my home, had wonderful, unexpected consequences. I was surprised by the extent to which these tiny clover and birdsfoot trefoil seeds and fragile seedlings supported me, and helped cultivate an appreciation within me of life, including my own life, and the joy of living.

**Today I have an opportunity. An opportunity to do the “right” thing. Right not because of what the result might be, but because of what my feeling about doing that thing is.**







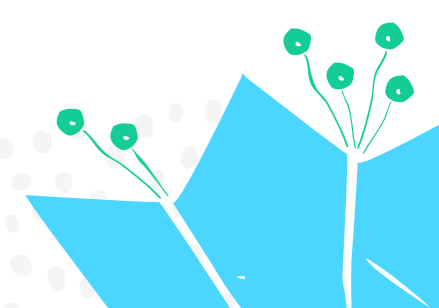
This journey has continued with deeper exploration of meditation practice, and the practice of awareness, supported by the courses and community of the Dublin Buddhist Centre. I have been able to apply these insights and “global appreciation” in my daily life and the communities I am part of, including those that seek stability, e.g. home and family relationships, and change, e.g. social and environmental action groups.

Most significantly, I have been able to apply this appreciation within myself, to develop a sense of self-care that goes beyond selective moments of “down-time”, growing my capacity for energy and resilience to purposefully step forward after setbacks. With so many thanks, I hold our Solidarity in Action community in deep appreciation.

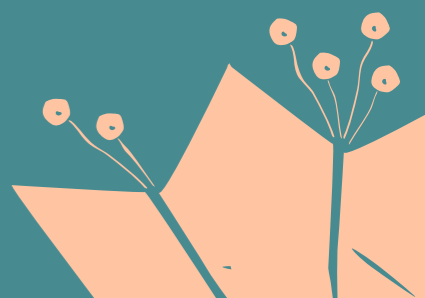
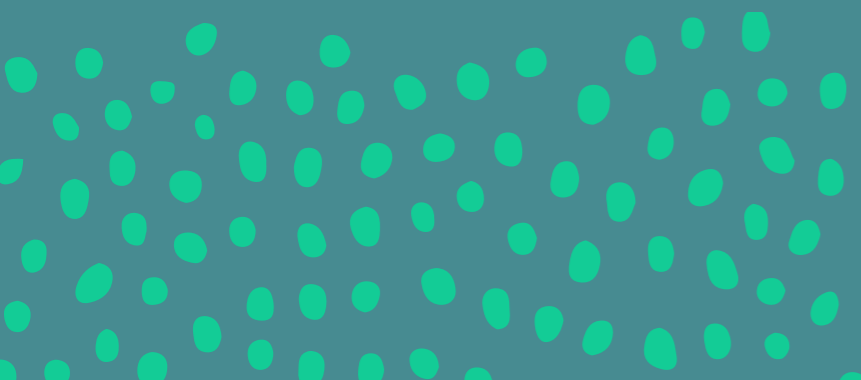
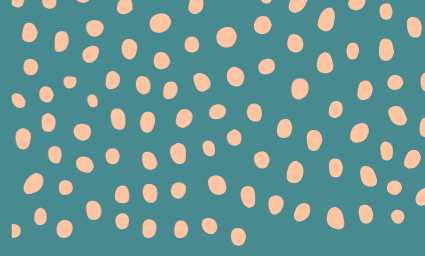
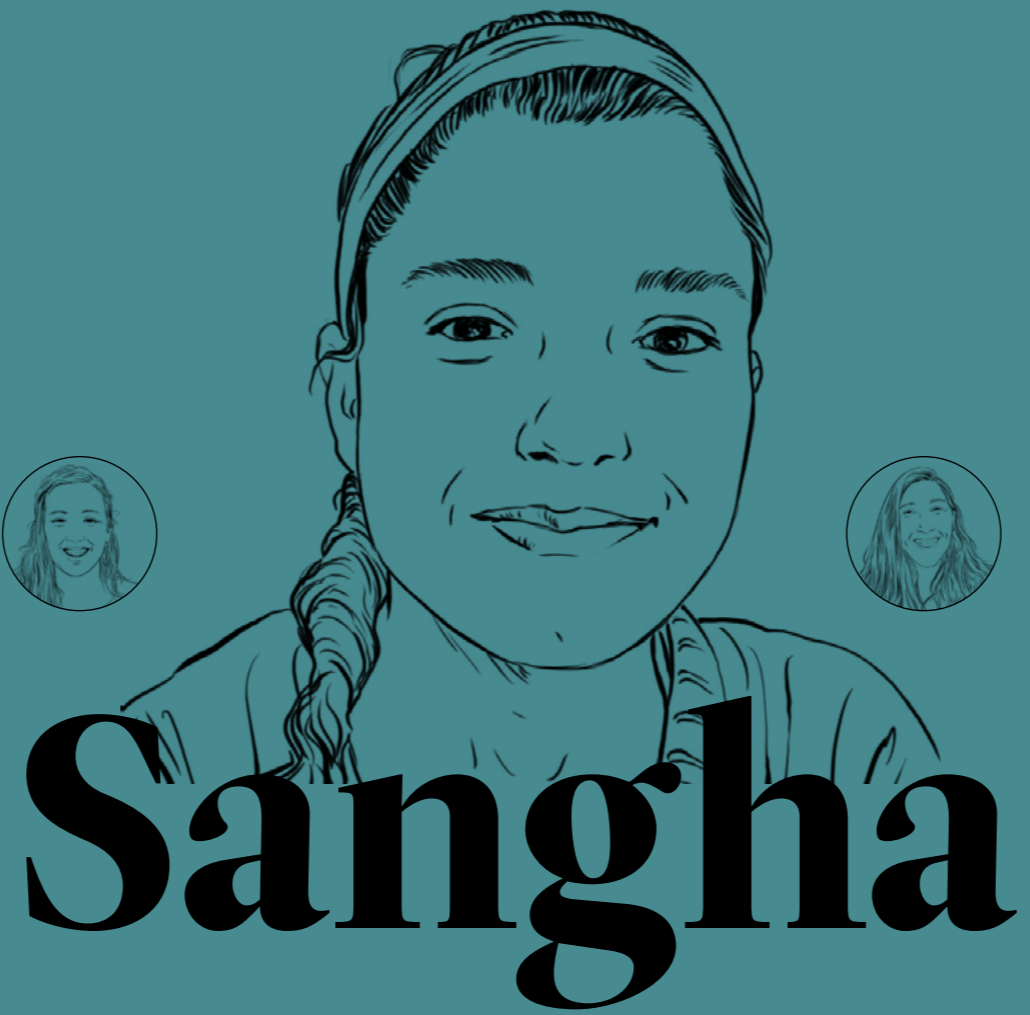
May you be well.

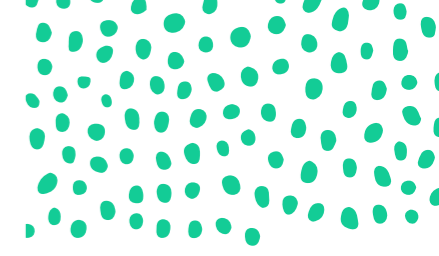


**Solidarity in Action has offered me a community-based cradle to develop global appreciation of the beauty and bounty of life, and all those that share it, including myself as part of this immense network of living things.**









## The Action Experiment

I set out to listen with my whole body for the month of May as a way to gather more perspectives around the climate crisis and other social justice issues. I wanted to understand how people perceive global issues and why they weren't acting on them as urgently as action was required. I did not target anyone specifically or use any specific questions but remained open and receptive in all my interpersonal interactions. I also used this 'whole body listening' as a way to absorb what's going on in the world today and thereby identify patterns of thoughts and behaviours in others and myself.

### Hear me, my daughters

Bright blue and orange robes: concealing,  
Protecting physical scars,  
War wounds from another planet.  
Emotional remnants of a wild journey,  
Nearly camouflaging skin, hardened  
By dust storms  
Betrayal  
Heat  
Frost.

Palms: wrinkled, hidden form view,  
Encasing, embracing a tinier replica  
...in each grip strengthened, a new alertness.  
Grief, embodied in tougher skin.  
Warmth, undiminished by sorrow.  
A shared hardship radiating wisdom  
Through softened touch...

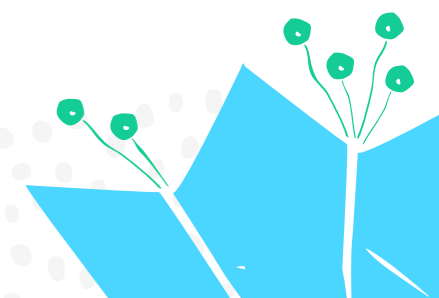
These unspoken words:

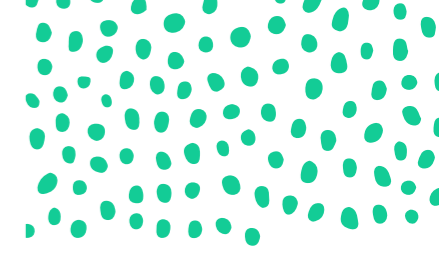
"Hear me, oh Daughters of the moon  
We will overcome.  
We will endure through the pain.  
A bright light shines in the distant universe, beckoning us on to better ways."

Faith: outspoken, unwavering, almost heroic.  
The un-fragility of humanness.  
The security of family.  
The safety of home.

Such comfort in love.

Written in August 2021, coming out of recent events around conflict and migration, especially in Afghanistan with women and children fleeing the country





## What shapes our communications

Characters & personalities influence what we consider important & how we choose to convey our thoughts & actions.

**choice**

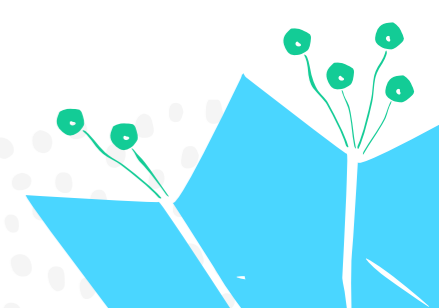
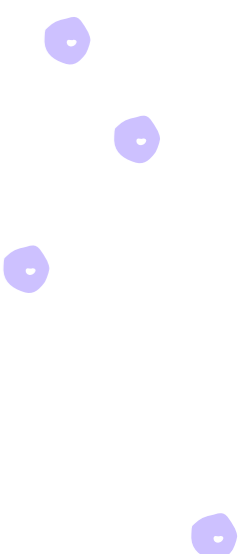
Individuals' own interactions with the world & encounters with information influence what we know & believe to be true.

How privileged we are & the power dynamics at play influence what we can afford to communicate.

**context**

Our life experiences & opportunities influence our values.

**circumstance**



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