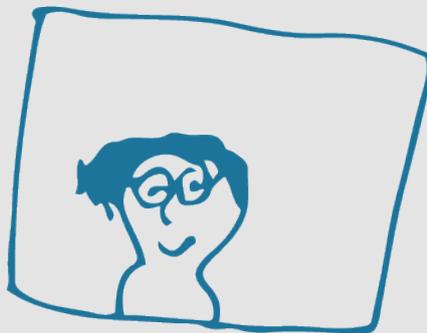
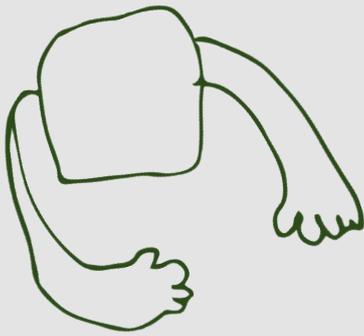
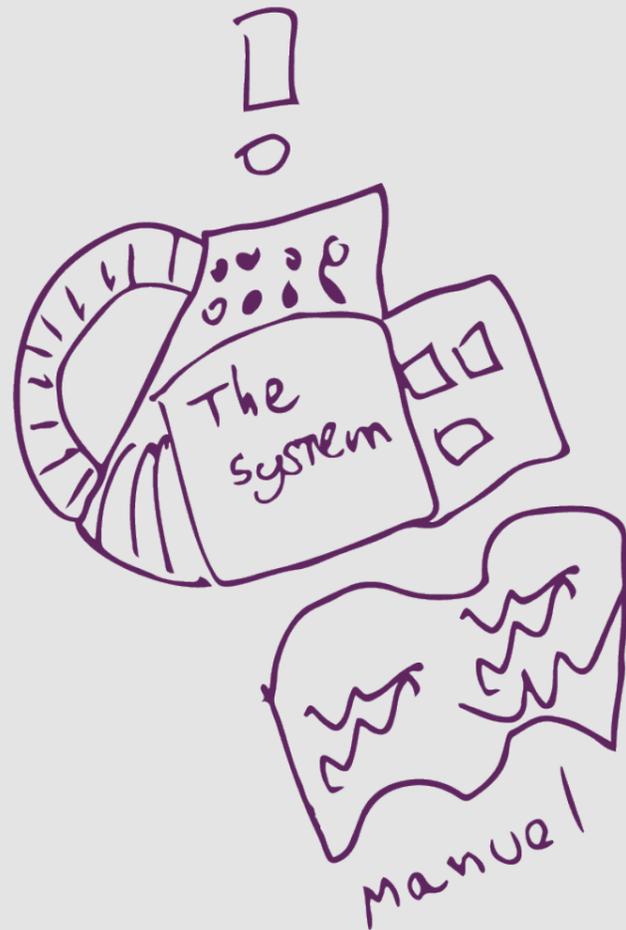




The Hub Story - a diary





Heart n Soul at The Hub was a research project led by the creative arts organisation Heart n Soul. We were funded by Wellcome's Hub Award to bring a group of very different people together to do research in new and exciting ways.

The people that worked on our project had different life experiences and backgrounds. Some were artists and designers, some were researchers and clinicians. Some people were autistic and/or learning disabled, some were non-disabled.

The most important thing about our research is that it was led by all these people together, working as equals. One of the things we are most proud of is creating the right space for this to happen. We did this in The Hub at Wellcome Collection and then online, after we began working from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Now, we are really happy to share with you some of the things we found out along the way.

Illustrations by Robyn Steward.

The Diary was written by John Kieffer.

Almost everybody who was part of Heart n Soul at The Hub contributed to Small Things Are Important - mostly without realising they had!

Part one

What follows are a series of personal observations, thoughts, anecdotes – some long, some short – starting from the first year Heart n Soul were resident in The Hub at Wellcome Collection. They are not always chronological and are intended to complement the wealth of material on the Heart n Soul at The Hub website.

It's the launch event and I'm holding a drink in one hand so a Heart n Soul artist can straighten her Elizabethan bonnet while I'm talking sensibly to a senior Wellcome staffer who is cradling our timekeeping bear called Trevor Curly in his other hand.

I can see already that being part of The Hub core team will require advanced multi-tasking skills.

[February 2019]



A view from above down through the glass atrium at Wellcome

The unmistakable shape of Pino moves quickly through the Street café

He means business

He is here to work

He is here to change stuff

Everyone is here to work and change stuff
and to laugh
and to develop new models of research
and to go to sleep
and to draw pictures that stay with you for days
and to make up powerful songs
and to eat biscuits

Welcome to The Hub
Welcome to a warm and fluffy machine

[April 2019]



The Hub is a different world to the arts and cultural world.

So much never-ending talk about diversity, inclusion, representation, and access - so little action.

So many conferences, courses and toolkits – so little change.

So much prescriptive language – so little meaning.

So much self-congratulation – so little reflection.

It's no wonder that the cultural world is increasingly homogenous.

Nobody here however is out of central casting.

Nobody here talks the talk.

A collective of one-offs.

"We're a funny bunch"

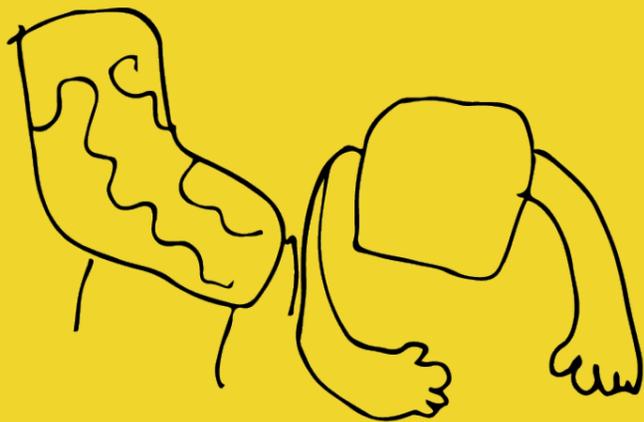
Thankfully.

[May 2019]

When you arrive at The Hub you pass through a bright yellow corridor decorated with artwork.

For someone like me with a (I hope) kindly but somewhat dark disposition there can, a bit like the yellow corridor, sometimes be almost too much light in The Hub. I have to withdraw a bit from the glare, hide out in the shade, regroup, and then dive back in.

[May 2019]



Heart n Soul creates a very particular sense of community around its work and The Hub project has brought many more people into its way of working. Sometimes that is no more than fleeting encounter. I am curious to know what those encounters feel like to newbies and what if anything people take away from the experience.

It is not unusual for a Hub experience to reach a point where ideas, feelings and actions all start to merge into one without any distinction. Also, the how and the what and the who get rearranged, messing with the process and with the normal hierarchy of things.

This is challenging not least because it can sometimes seem at odds with my own carefully crafted and probably mechanistic 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' approach to life. The more I live with it however - the more I think I like it.

[August 2019]



Words do not run things at The Hub but for what is in the best possible way an experiential and even tactile organisation and project, the language of The Hub is interesting.

George Clinton the US funk musician once said: “Nothing is good unless u play with it!!”. Putting aside the double entendre – George puts his finger on African American culture’s tendency to put diverse and sometimes multiple meanings on words.

At times something similar happens with Heart n Soul at The Hub. Different meanings and inflections come into play in conversation. A discussion about connections and connectivity is approached in all kinds of ways and all at the same time – serious, sad, funny, personal, political, practical – with great fluidity and somersaults in meaning. Repetition of a word or phrase for example sometimes brings a spark of clarity; sometimes puts us back for a few more turns on the loop.

[August 2019]

Life can be hard for people with learning disabilities and autistic people, and it seems that Heart n Soulers often need a period of transition or decompression when they arrive at The Hub. So, I also worry that the reverse may also be true, and it must be hard to leave The Hub and return to the 'real world'.

The challenge on how to translate the Heart n Soul / Hub experience into the real world has always been there but it is starting to feel if not more urgent; then certainly more poignant.

One of my recent transitions back into the real world exposed me to some research that revealed that around 7 million UK citizens hold a set of 'latent' views, attitudes and behaviours that were grouped together as 'libertarian right'. This nasty bundle includes the view that vulnerable people should not be protected or helped in any way by the state.

Counter to this and partly informed by the fruits of whistle blowing staff and investigative journalism, there is increased public concern about the indignities and oppression of people with learning disabilities and autistic people by a system that is meant to help them.

So public policy is being pulled in a number of different directions and has been for many years, and when you add funding cuts to the mix, it is no surprise that many if not most professionals feel that they are unable to do their jobs properly and are uncomfortable with being the 'agents' of a system that is riddled with contradictions.

The lived experience of many people with a learning disability and autistic people however is that they are not protected or helped enough by the state and their relationship with professionals employed directly or indirectly by the state can at best be empowering but more often it is problematic and at worst the cause of anxiety if not fear.

So, we have massive collective cognitive dissonance around the whole 'care' space? This is the messy public policy arena where the forthcoming Third Space project at The Hub site is located – perhaps the most difficult. The 'cared for' and the 'carers' both end up in an unhappy place, trying to make sense of a system that does not work.

Can we learn anything from a creative engagement between people where the playing field is a level as possible?

Analogues can be useful - well it is a kind of short hand after all.

They can be helpful.

Heart n Soul's residency at The Hub might demonstrate that it has kindred spirits out there.

Possibly not in the 'arts and disability' or 'arts and health' worlds but elsewhere?

Several seem close but not close enough

Who are they and where are they?

[December 2019]



Reading the walls in The Hub is a good way to find out what is going on

The place is full of people even when you are on your own

It tells you most of what you need to know

Explosions of love and empathy and anger and humour

Present

WE ARE HERE

Correct

WE SHOULD BE HERE

And yes

WE OWN THIS SPACE

[October 2019]

No sooner has something been identified as an 'issue' in a particular community or in society as a whole, then what seems almost a set repertoire of responses kicks in, from government of all sizes, the media, local councils, and increasingly the arts and cultural sector. What often starts as genuine concern as prompted by a report, a TV documentary or a piece in a newspaper or social media then becomes subject to a process of containment and sometimes marginalisation.

Committees are formed, initiatives are started, funds are endowed, new jobs are created, and more often than not very little happens, and the cycle starts again a few years down the line. Generally, this is not the result of bad intentions, but more by system failure.

In the case of people with learning disabilities and autistic people this is a failure to take proper account of their views.

What we've learnt though (particular with the co-research process) is to do this properly will take time and all that time is necessary to fully reflect those views. It is also important to accept that this process will not develop in a straight line and will not simply be an exercise in 'consultation' that then just confirms the prevailing view.

It has to be real and it has to be different.

[November 2019]

There is a distinct change of dynamic in the last few weeks. A sense of ideas and approaches falling into place to create a real sense of forward momentum. There is now so much different activity that probably only a handful of people in the project team know about everything that is happening.

On a day when I was in the area, I make an unscheduled visit to The Hub and every bit of desk and table space is filled. Drawings are being drawn, films are being made, and there's some people from another organisation in the meeting room.

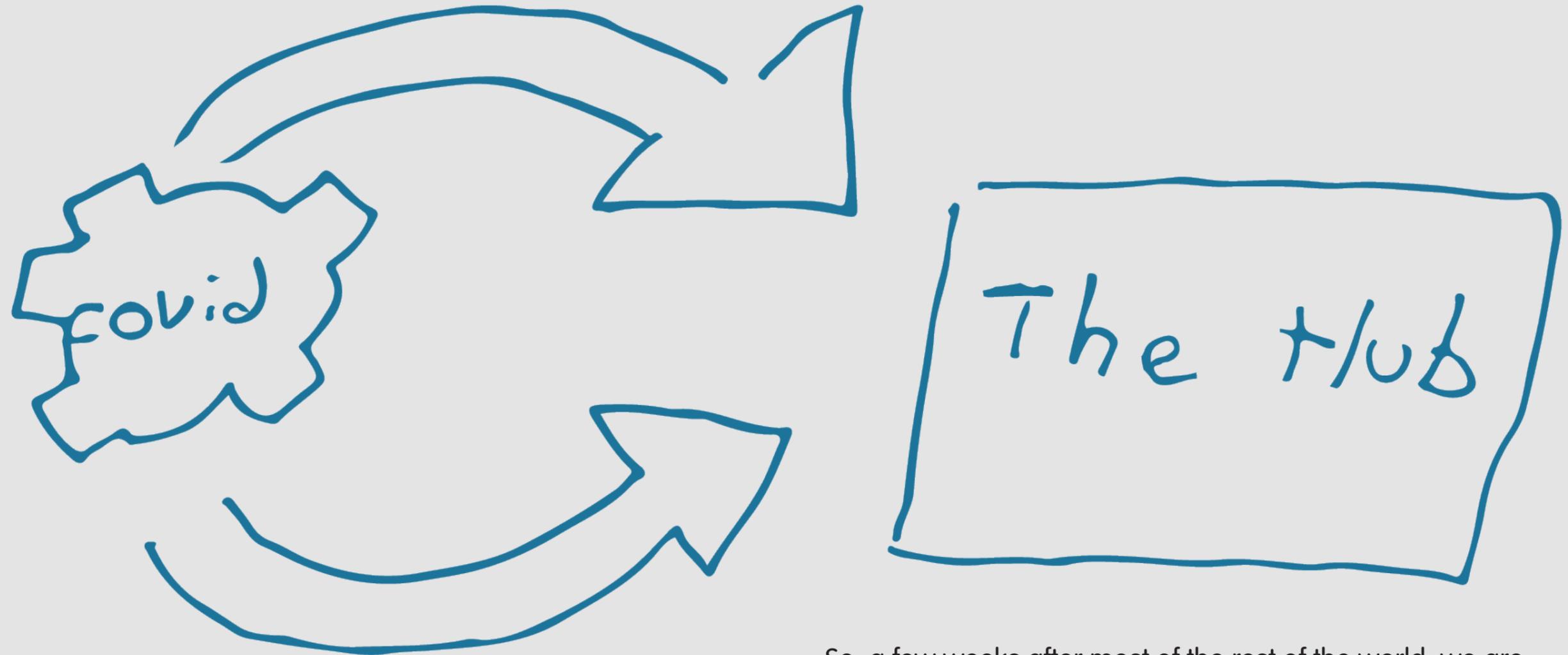
Full House!

I slope off.

[January 2020]

I return to from a trip to Oslo where they are taking the new coronavirus very seriously to London where they are not. At the front of my mind is what will happen to The Hub when we finally wake up to what is going on. I keep these thoughts to myself. Then a week later there's a trip to Copenhagen where they are taking it even more seriously and I start to fear the worst.

[January/February 2020]



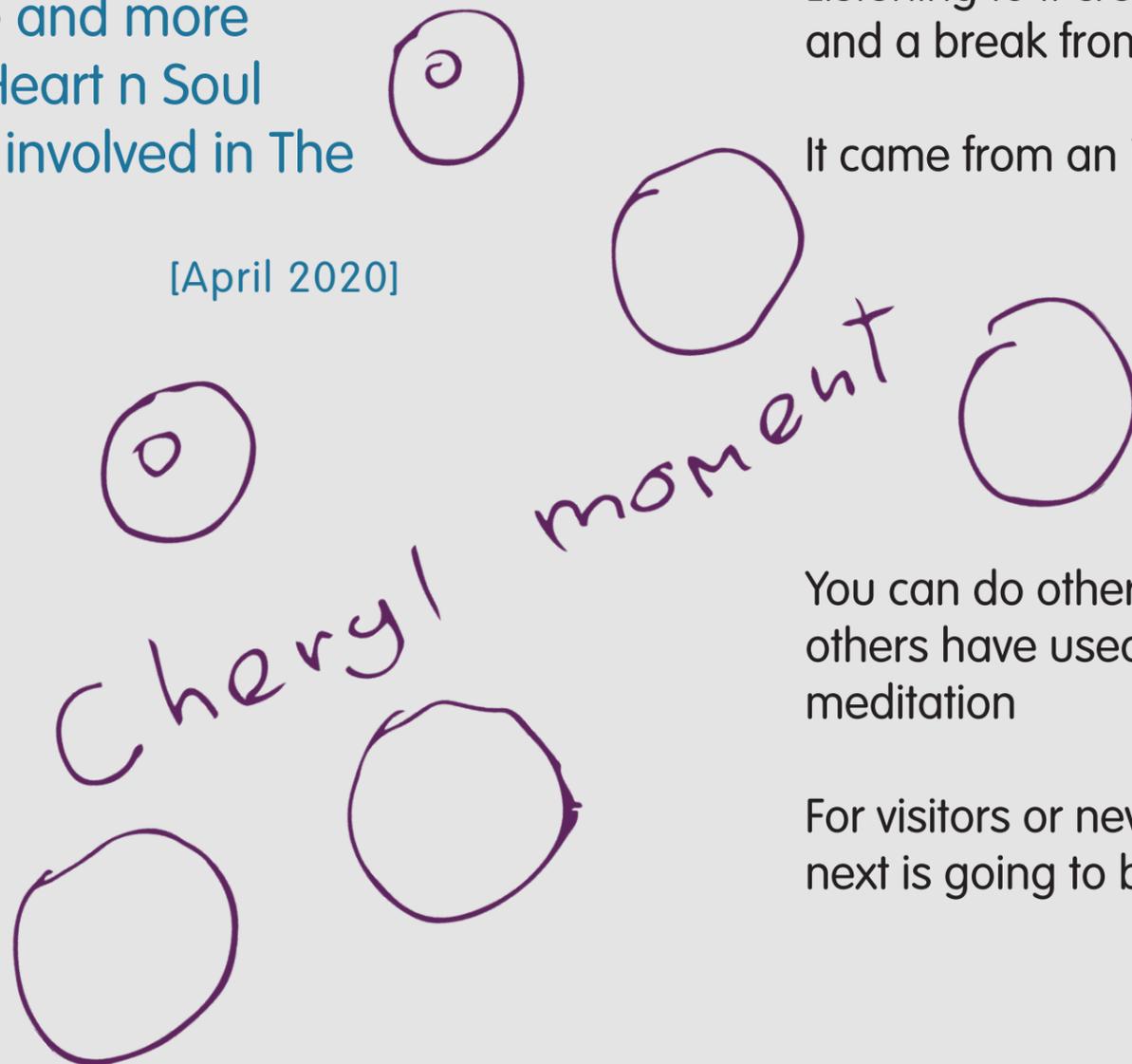
So, a few weeks after most of the rest of the world, we are locked down. It comes quickly, without even a chance to say goodbye to our beautiful bespoke space. With only seven months of the project left, I think that a lot of us feel inside that we may not return.

[March 2020]

Part two

There is no head-scratching or whining here. A few weeks into lockdown and there is a plan for much of Heart n Soul's work to move to digital platforms. The dividing line between Heart n Soul at The Hub and the Heart n Soul mothership that has always been blurred has now almost disappeared. Even before lockdown more and more people from the extended Heart n Soul community were becoming involved in The Hub.

[April 2020]



Online and the real world are of course very different, but it is surprising how many features of The Hub have carried over into how we do things now.

The 'Cheryl Moment' for example was used at the beginning of meetings and events in The Hub and has moved online and has been enhanced by visuals and pre-recorded voiceovers. It is almost iconic in how it encapsulates the flavour of Heart n Soul.

Some of it was initially hidden from view – Cheryl's vocals were only revealed on the recording

Listening to it creates a friendly and relaxing ambience and a break from the outside world

It came from an improvisation – a jam

You can do other things with it – Pino, Michaela and others have used it as a basis for a short guided meditation

For visitors or newcomers, it tells them that what's coming next is going to be different

[June 2020]



Like everyone, I am now spending most of my life on Zoom. Hub meetings on Zoom though have all the charm of those in the original space.

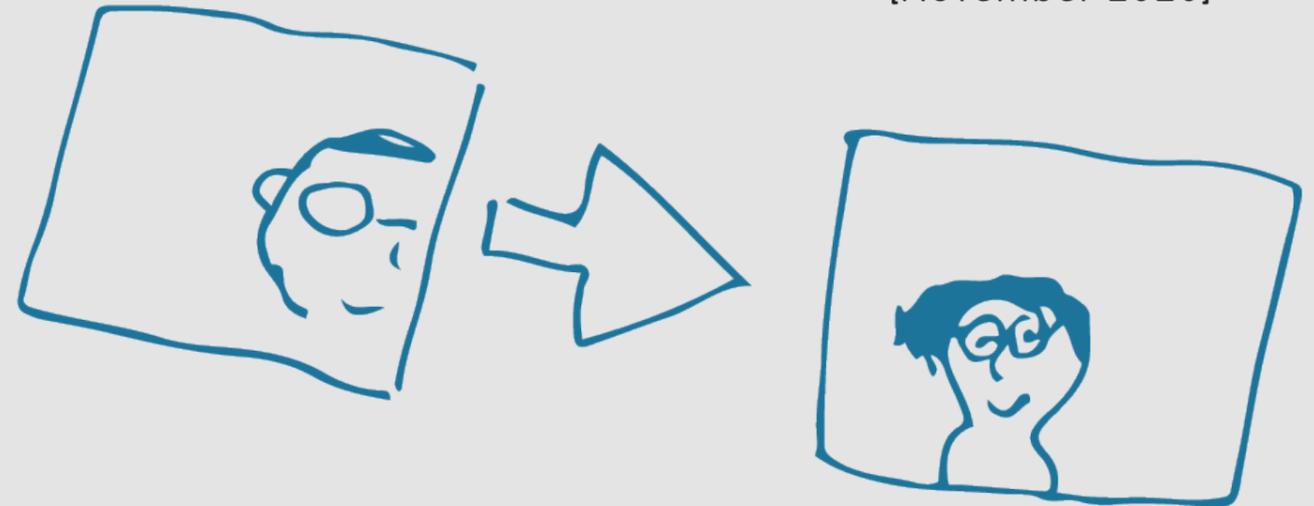
- Serious
- Funny
- Wiggly lines
- Moments of clarity
- Sudden interjections on the price of ice cream
- Lying down
- Babies having lunch
- People suddenly disappearing and reappearing
- Grandstanding cats
- Sharing of drawings and favourite TV programmes

Always getting there though
Always getting there

[September 2020]

Yes of course – online is different to offline. I do find myself thinking about The Hub space and all the activity. The Heart n Soul cushions and furniture, the glass room, the red table, the kitchen, the chill out room, the jars full of pens, tins full of biscuits, all live on through lockdown. We may never get back to the space but for me there is a very clear mental map.

[November 2020]



We are getting better and better at this Zoom thing.

We can see and hear everyone. A couple of months ago we could only see the top of Pino's head. Now his is perfectly centred in his rectangle. Ono's box is an explosion of coloured walls and energy. Michaela and Robyn are deep in their domestic landscapes. Has Melissa's screen frozen? No – she's just a calm person. Baby Finn is wondering why all these people are watching him having lunch.

A few days later the screen becomes a mosaic of faces for an Allsorts session. Yes, this is digital engagement Heart n Soul style.

[December 2020]

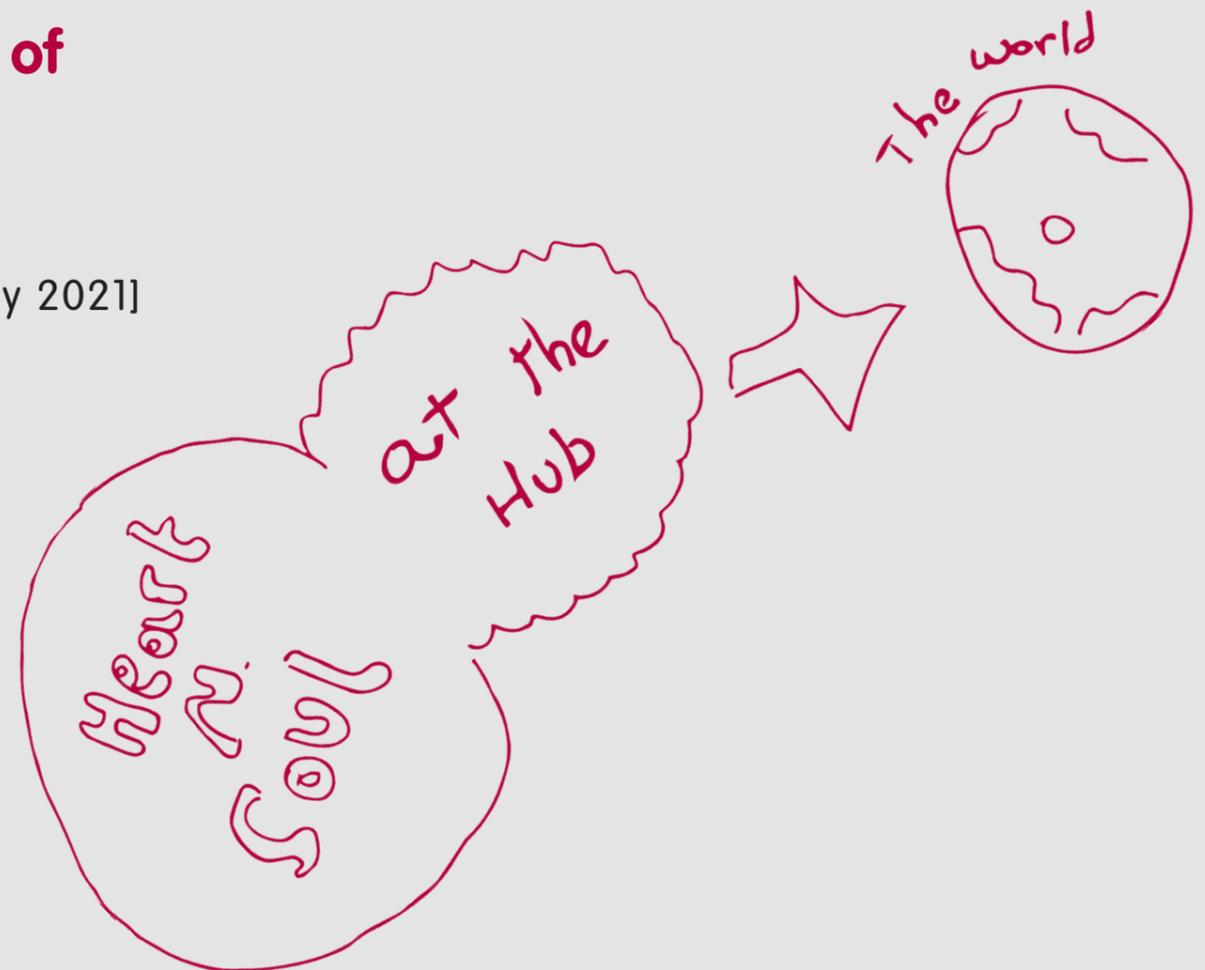
The pandemic of course had an effect on the project, but when it came there was action rather than head scratching and the momentum changed rather than stopped.

We are close to the endgame now, although most of what has been Heart n Soul at The Hub will find a home elsewhere in a new form and in a new light.

I am sure what we have learned will resonate well beyond Spring 2021.

Everyone is better from having been part of Heart n Soul at The Hub.

[January 2021]



Small things are important

This section pulls together comments and snatches of conversation by people in The Hub that I have noted down since the start of the project. Sometimes they come from meetings or workshops but just as likely they come from the kitchen or over lunch. Some have become part of our ethos whilst others are more ephemeral or just funny. I have not dated or attributed any of the following and there are no prizes for guessing.

Ask people what they want and give it to them!

I WAS HAVING
A SAD DAY.
NOW I'M HERE
I CAN'T
REMEMBER
WHY I WAS SAD.

- * Sausages
- * Anything else that's special?
- * No – just sausages

- * I'm an explorer!
- * We're all explorers

People talking; nice music; calm – it was very nice

I like working. I like being a co-researcher very much.

I love watching it all come together in the room. It seems so natural and so different to what I usually do

There's something special about everyone sharing their stories

PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE.
That's it really

* It's like a family

* But you don't often have a Jam with your family

* You do in my family

{laughs}

I took my cake home to my Mum and brother and we ate it together

* It's a cake with another cake inside it

* Nice!

**MY GUITAR IS HOW I LOOK
AFTER MYSELF**

- * **I see magic moments to come**
- * **Where?**
- * **Last week**
- * **oh ..?**

I like meeting new people here. It's interesting

I'm not used to people listening to what I say

* You know, a lot of people didn't think we could do things like this

* I always did. We just needed a chance

* {Sings Give me a chance, please give me a chance! }

{Much laughter all round}

Accessible doesn't have to be boring

SORRY - NO TOOLKITS HERE

I WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD REALLY

I like drawing and painting what I'm thinking. It's what I feel inside more than talking.

- * **EVERYONE AROUND HERE SMILES A LOT**
- * **MAYBE THAT'S WHY THIS PLACE IS CALLED WELCOME**

** What do you like about being at The Hub?*

** What's The Hub?*

*I'll have some of the little tomatoes

*They're radishes

*It definitely wasn't rubbish

Oh no, don't give me that!
Not more chit chat!

