

Joe:

I'm Joe Langley. I'm a design engineer and a design researcher based at Sheffield Hallam University with a group called Lab4Living, which brings together artists, designers, and health care professionals and health researchers to apply creative practices and design practices, to address issues of health and wellbeing.

Thomas:

I'm Thomas. I'm a member at Heart n Soul and I worked on the Inclusive Futures project at The Hub. And I'm a co-designer and artist.

Chris:

I'm Chris McGinley. I'm a senior research fellow at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design based in the Royal College of Art. I lead the age and diversity research and design work there.

Joe:

It sounds like you've had a fantastic time, a fantastic journey. That really came up strongly for me was that you were being listened to properly. A number of people felt from Heart n Soul that you were being listened to. What was it that made you feel that you were being listened to properly?

Thomas:

It was they understood us. Sometimes some people don't understand what you need or of what you've been through or what you're going through and what you need in the right way. And they just connected with us when we told them about ourselves.

Joe:

So there's an empathy thing there is it? It's something-

Thomas:

Yeah.

Joe:

Yeah. Taking the point that you were teaching the designers, as well. What were the things that allowed you to realise that you were teaching the designers, as well?

Thomas:

They were really impacted by what we wanted to and some of them may have not realised it or known about it.

Joe:

The thing that struck me, as well, from that first video was the focus on the methods the designers used to enable people to connect with each other and engage, because it seems that that was of the making. I think it was the comment Robyn made that says, "When you talk about inclusion, usually you end up working with people who write. So policy makers or other people like that. But with designers, you were making stuff." What do you think it was about this kind of difference between making that made it easier for everyone to engage?

Thomas:

Because people can see it and people can have their own take on it. And everyone's different.

Joe:

There were three specific forms of making that you all had a go at. There was drawing pictures, 3D modeling, and radio. And again, what was it about those specific methods that you think really helped to get everyone involved in the process?

Chris:

Kind of like Robyn said, this idea of recipes, we had different modes, so whatever people were excited by or interested in or comfortable with or wanted to try out, those options were there to work through everyday experiences and things that maybe caused a bit of frustration or things they'd been thinking about. We can call that a carousel, so people gravitated towards the stuff that they were maybe most familiar with at the beginning, or where it interested them. And some people went really deep with that. That's the way we played it. It was about giving people different options.

Joe:

So there's maybe this balance between giving people options with the media they can engage with so that they find something they feel comfortable, but at the same time, encouraging them to try something different and new because that newness can also enable people to see things from different perspectives.

Chris:

You guys are the designers. We were very much trying to get people design doing, if you like, not just design thinking, but design doing putting stuff out there and stimulating and bouncing off of each other's

ideas. Everyone had great ideas, so you want to let everyone get an insight into them so we can all be inspired.

Joe:

Is that something that you think could become part of the curriculum almost? Or could or should?

Chris:

So I think absolutely. We opened this up to, I think, 20 students, something like that. So I think they valued that experience and this idea of them learning and being taught by the co-designers, by Thomas and the gang. That was really clear. So some of the themes are being taken forward in other projects. Students are looking for these kind of opportunities. It was a two-way conversation if you like. It really was designing together.

Joe:

I think the idea of having, as you said, the time, having that security of time, freedom, increases creativity.

Chris:

Yeah. I think Heart n Soul are really good at that. And I think design really benefits from that. So I think it can be there. It's just people appreciating it and understanding the value and building it in ... And the more meaningful, the more inclusive, are the ones where there's reflection and you really understand the issues well.

Joe:

One could tell that time had been invested into just framing the questions and identifying the right questions before you even get into design. But that ability that they seem to have to just slow the pace down and give that better quality time to consider things is just a really valuable asset, I think, that Heart n Soul have. It's very powerful.

Chris:

I think everyone can speak design, let's say. You know? I think that was part of it. It was trying to demystify design a little. And when you were asking Thomas earlier if you could teach other students, I think he absolutely could. I think now they've had this exposure and experience and they've created, and they've designed. I think, yeah. They were our co-designer cohort and we'll be taking them forward into other projects. And everyone can contribute to design and everyone's an expert of their own lived experience. You can't make assumptions about how people are experiencing things. Two exhibitions we had and the website's looking amazing. All this stuff's going to be really easy for people to see the value and the designerly ways people are approaching things.

Joe:

One of the words that came up in that last film so many times was fun. How important was that as part of the process?

Thomas:

Well, it's always good to be creative because it helps. And sometimes working together and working on the same thing. Yeah. It just came out of it because we were enjoying what we were doing.

Joe:

There is something ultimately in any kind of creative activity that's essentially very good for a person's wellbeing.

Thomas:

Yeah. Because I'm really quite creative and my skills are practical skills and sometimes I struggle with talking and explaining things, but I'm able to express it physically or creatively. So for me, that really helped having a lot of different ways.

Joe:

Yeah. So it helped you to engage in the project and then connect with the other people on the team, as well.

Thomas:

Yeah. Because if I couldn't explain it, then I was able make it and draw it. Yeah. They understood it that way, but sometimes I could share it, which they understood it the same.

Joe:

And that goes full circle back to Chris' point about having the variety of different media to engage with because it's so important for enabling people to find a form for their self-expression that fits them, that suits them.

So if you had a message to send to other policy makers and other researchers who talk about inclusivity and working with people, what would you say to them?

Thomas:



Understand the people you're working with first and get to know them a bit and spend time with them and find out what they're about and what they can do and get to know them.