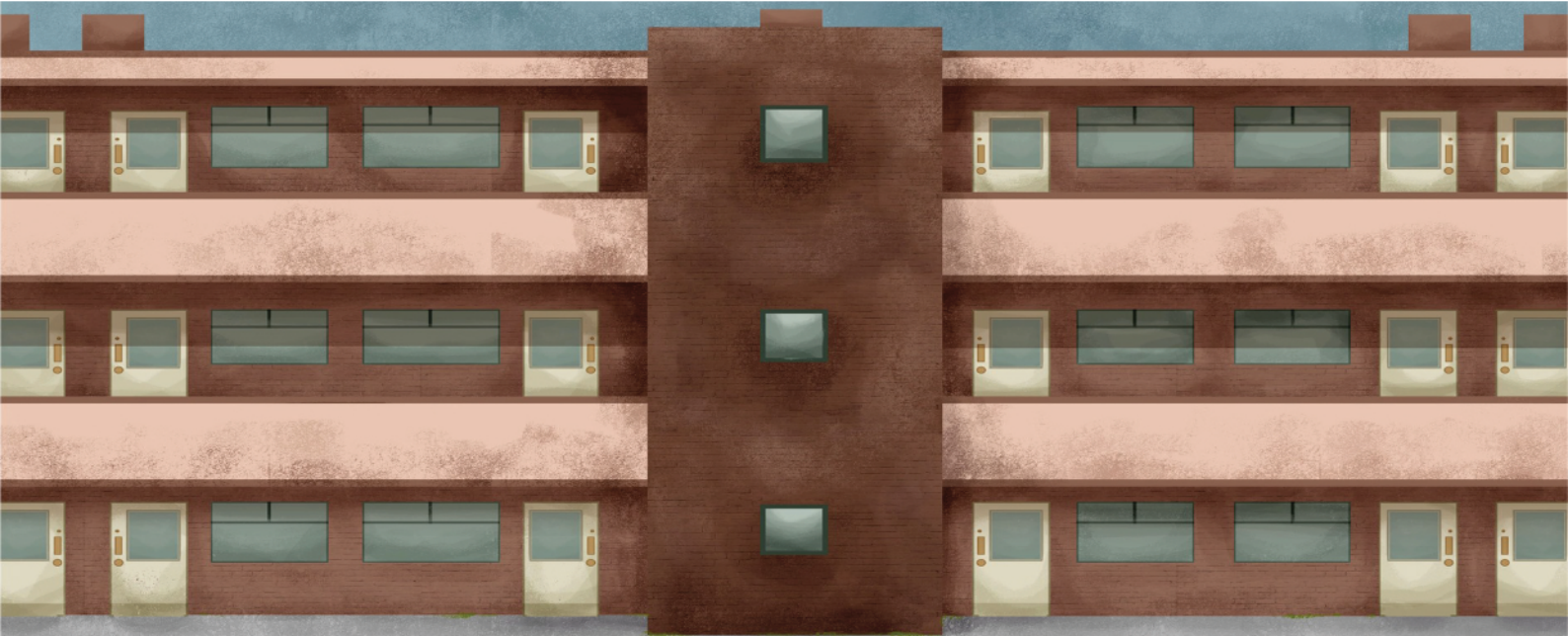




the Blocks



A Workbook for Groups



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1. Introduction

Welcome to our workbook. This guide has been developed to offer an overview of the process for those wishing to use the animations in a facilitated group setting. I wish to acknowledge the generosity and bravery of those members of the family support Step by Step group who contributed to this sensitive, honest and beautiful telling of their personal experiences growing up in inner-city Dublin. The city may be different in so many ways today, but watching the animation, you will immediately relate to many of the issues and feelings raised in the telling of their stories.

Established in 1992, The Rialto Community Drug team was the first community-based Drug team in Dublin. Our main focus is to offer support for all those affected by addiction in any way: with support ranging from key-working, housing, family support, family therapy, prison links, holistic therapies, drop-in and outreach.

We understand there are many underlying causes of addiction and addicted behaviours. This short course and animation are underpinned by our understanding of the long-term impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the value in taking time to explore this in a safe setting. The animation also highlights the impact of 'Hidden Harm' that is the unseen consequences of addiction on others – children and young people. The importance of building resilience to become healthier, stronger and happier individuals then becomes our renewed focus.

We aim to produce three short animations in this series following the life of Sissy. So, for now, we hope you enjoy the animation and find the workbook helpful as a guide to facilitated sessions. We welcome feedback, so please do contact us with any suggestions you may have.

With the support of our funders, HSE and Canals Community Drugs and Alcohol Task Force, we can make this resource free to use. The workbook may also be reproduced; however, we would ask that the Rialto Community Drug Team is acknowledged when doing so.

So, on behalf of all those involved in 'The Blocks', I am proud to launch this workbook – a creative response to all in recovery from addiction, the impact of addiction, and those who will use this resource to build their resilience.

Trish Conway, Chairperson, Rialto Community Drug Team, October 2020

2. Acknowledgements

The Step by Step group for allowing their very personal life experiences to be shared with others through this workbook and animation. Their original intention to use animation was to keep their identities anonymous however as time passed they became more open to, as they put it themselves, “if our stories can be of any help to others they would be honoured”.

Joanie Whyte a natural and very skilled facilitator who created a safe space and had the courage to seek creative expression of the group process.

Gareth Gowran and Sadhbh Lawlor of ‘Splitting Borders Production’ for their incredible attention to detail, creative expression and ability to gain total acceptance by the group, because of their ability to be present, listen and interpret life experiences into beautiful animation.

Phyllis Corish for her incredible voice-over of the animation, capturing the tones and sounds that draws you straight into the film. Not to mention the numerous teas and food served before the group sessions.

Alan Cleere, Team Leader and all the staff of the Rialto Community Drug team for their professionalism and support for the group and making the group feel at home in the project.

Canals Community Drugs & Alcohol Task Force for granting us targeted Intervention funding towards this project.

HSE for financial support and allowing the flexibility to include this in our work programme.

Damian Hart of Merseyside Youth Association-Liverpool CAMHS for his encouragement and time taken to share his considerable experience around mental health training and the use of some of their resources highlighted in this workbook.

City of Dublin Education and Training Board for tutor hours granted for the animation classes.



3. Background

The Blocks is an animated short film made by the Rialto Community Drug Team group Step by Step with artist Gareth Gowran and his small production company Splitting Borders. A group of five local women, led by facilitator Joanie Whyte, worked emotionally and creatively on a process to explore the generational impact of addiction on family life. They invited Gareth Gowran into the journey to support them to develop a story and script that would be translated into an animated film. The result is an intimate depiction of life through the eyes and hearts of girls in Dublin sixty years ago. Rose, Margaret, June, Maureen, Joanie and Janet are keen to share the complexity of happy, content childhood memories mixed with the worries and fears of adult life that are bigger than any child's ability to cope.

The purpose of this workbook is to offer a support to the facilitators for groups which are open to explore issues arising when using 'The Blocks' animation. The nature of the content will most likely give space for participants to share personal stories, past and present effecting their lives and wider families.

The very nature and design of the animation and questions might raise significant issues that are already present in people's lives.

It will promote increased personal awareness. Some of the issues that came up for us were powerlessness, taking back control and understanding what happens when addiction is present in the participant, their family and community.

The group gave an opportunity to speak about taboos, the elements of our lives that are covered in secrecy and shame or it may be that we simply don't have the words to express the thoughts and emotions attached to events. The sharing of lifelong patterns and the hearing of others people's stories can have a powerful impact on individuals and helps increase openness and empathy in participants lives. The group learnt that they may not have the power to change others but the only person you can change was yourself.

The group highlighted suppressed dreams and hopes, individually as women, as women living in marginalised communities, overburdened and not being able to be a child. Some of the participants spoke of the toxic shame related to poverty, alcoholism, lack of education, the inability to express themselves and the lack of safe spaces to explore these issues.

What worked well in this group was the flexibility to respond to whatever was going on in the group. The facilitator would have a plan for each session however priority was given to any particular crisis that came up during the initial check-in with the group. The facilitator gave space to explore how people were feeling.





4. Core Requirements

At a minimum we would recommend that anyone taking on the workbook would have qualified or have well experienced facilitation/group work skills. These include;

- Goals and roles.
- Communication.
- Conflict management.
- Decision making/problem solving
- Listening and empathy
- Keeping on track with desired outcomes

As mentioned in the introduction there are a number of strands of evidenced based practice which inform the approach taken in this work and ones which we would recommend to all those using this workbook.

- Training for Transformation & Community Development approach
- Childhood Adverse Experience
- Resilience Theory
- Hidden Harm

With regard to going for a community arts based outcome as well, the artist who worked on this project had training to degree level in his particular area of work so a similar qualification or corresponding experience in their chosen field would be recommended. The artist had also been working in the community with different organisations for three years prior to taking on this project. This meant they were bringing a developed awareness of the personality of the area and an understanding through experience of how to build trust and support the group members individual self-expression knowing that they wanted to produce a cohesive piece of work.

5. Course Principles

Training for transformation and Community Development

"Reflection without action is mere verbalism. Action without reflection is pure activism."

This course tries to combine both reflection and action in a clear and simple way. This workbook and animation recognises that participants entering the learning/support group come as if with a suitcase already full of their experience, theory and values. Our approach is to facilitate people to open the suitcases, begin to take out the contents and lay them down alongside those of other participants.

The facilitator makes a commitment to follow the energy, interests and needs of participants, rather than rigidly following prescribed programme plan.

Paulo Freire (philosopher and critical education thinker) based his approach to education on the following principles:

- Emotion is linked to Motivation. People are motivated to learn and act around issues about which they feel strongly.
- Learners are the experts in their own lives. Participants' experience is a primary source of learning as those who live with social injustice know better than anyone about social injustice.
- Pose problems rather than give solutions. The educator and facilitator's role is not to hand out ready-made answers, but to facilitate participants to analyse their reality and decide themselves how to respond. The educator does this by posing back to participants the issues they grapple with in a way that facilitates them to constructively engage with those issues
- One of the practices in this approach is to create a 'code'. A code may be a song, an article, a story, a play. It demonstrates a problem about which the group has strong feelings, does not provide answers but allows discussion from a distance to explore and support group members arrive at their own understanding.

In this instance the facilitators and participants came up with Sissy, the likeable, anonymous child who gave expression to the feelings and experiences felt by each member of the group.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

ACE's are highly stressful and potentially traumatic events or situations that occur during childhood/adolescence under the age of 18 years. This could be a single event, prolonged threat or breach to a young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity which can have long-lasting health and social consequences. These experiences directly effect a young person and their environment, and require significant social, emotional, neurobiological, psychological or behavioural adaption. No one is immune from ACE's.

The ten widely recognised (ACEs), as identified in a [US study from the 1990s](#), are:

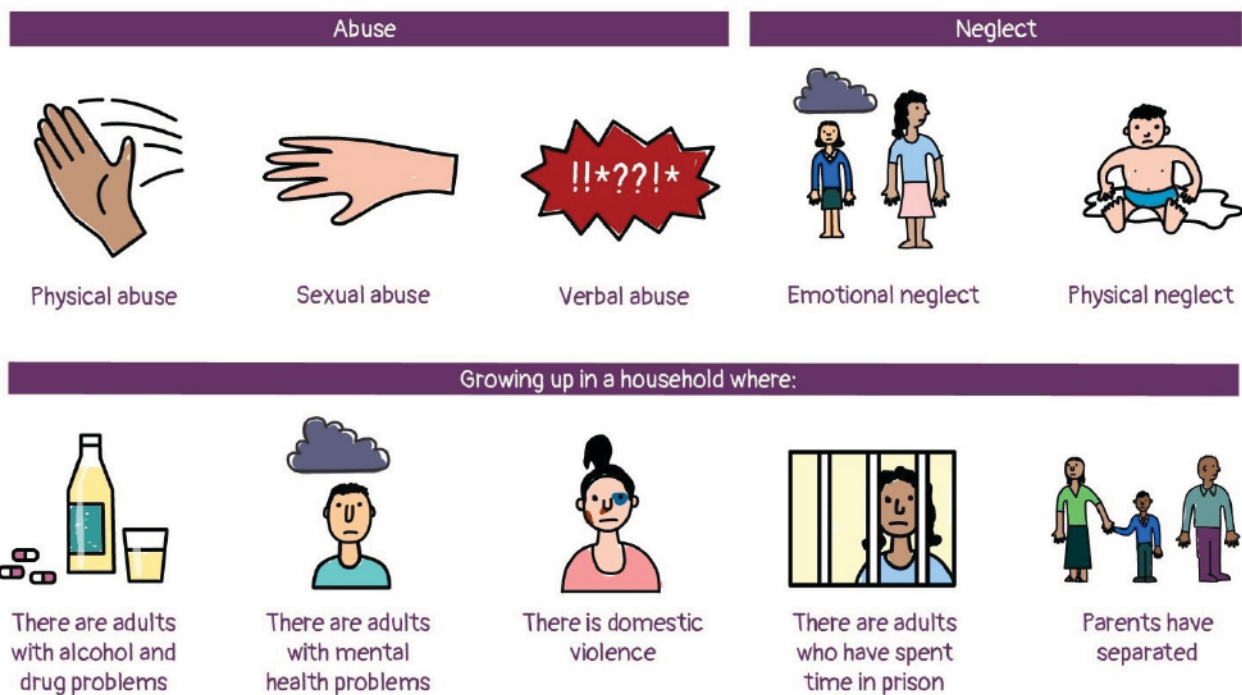


Image credit: Merseyside Youth Association/Liverpool CAMHS

As well as these 10 ACEs there is a range of other types of childhood adversity. These can have similar negative long-term effects. These include bereavement, bullying, poverty. In addition to these, there are community adversities such as living in a deprived area, neighbourhood violence etc.

In this short film we can see, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical/emotional neglect, substance misuse, domestic violence and poverty among others.

Significant research points to the long term impacts on children experiencing this toxic stress. For example research by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris and Young Minds (Liverpool) showed that they are 4x more likely to have poor mental health, 7x more likely to be involved in violence and 11x more likely to use illicit drugs.

Thankfully today there are numerous training opportunities and resources to support a trauma informed approach to work. Most of us in the addiction field will fully appreciate the high level of trauma experienced by most if not all of our clients.

We can prevent and reduce the harms of ACE's in the lives of those we work with allowing people to build the resilience they need to live healthier and more grounded lives.

Resilience theory

In order for people to build resilience they need to have the following five elements;

- 1 Basic –safety, housing, healthy diet, enough money to live, enough sleep, exercise and time for play/leisure
- 2 Belonging – a sense of belonging, making connection/friends, understand their place in the world, supported positive thinking
- 3 Learning – explore a learning culture environment, develop organisational and life skills, find mentors and recognise achievements.
- 4 Coping – build courage, solving problem skills, encourage fun, anxiety management, breaking the negative cycle, building and understanding boundaries.
- 5 Core self; developing hope, develop empathy, self-awareness, taking responsibility, building confidence and self-worth.

These are the vital steps which all of us need to develop throughout our lives. Taking time to develop an awareness around these build them into the lives of the participants can be a life-long process however the objective of the workbook is to have participants identify the areas they may be weak on and put in place the building blocks to strengthen each of the five elements of resilience.

Hidden Harm

The experience of children living with, and affected by, parental substance misuse has become known as 'Hidden Harm' because these children are often unknown to services. Not all parents who misuse substances experience difficulties with parenting capacity. Equally, not all

children exposed to parental substance misuse are affected adversely either in the short or longer term. However, most children exposed to parental substance misuse need some form of support. When parents misuse substances it can and does cause serious harm to children at every age.

Children whose parents misuse substances can:

- 1 Experience greater risk of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders;
- 2 Experience emotional and physical neglect; and
- 3 Develop serious emotional, social and substance misuse problems later in life.

In the course of the animation emotional and physical neglect is experienced by Sissy and the other children. However towards the end of the course the participants themselves began to reconcile themselves with the tough lives their parents and siblings had. This allowed them both the space to own the losses they faced but also gained an empathy for their parents and other adults in the community. To mark this they chose a series of beautiful yet poignant photographs from their childhood to represent this time.

For more information please see the HSE's National Hidden Harm Project <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/homelessness-and-addiction/national-hidden-harm-project/>

Creative Process Overview

The creative aspect of the project is rooted in a community arts approach, that is art based in and produced in a community setting. This type of work can be made in any media and using any type of artistic process. What's important is that it's centred in interaction and dialogue with a group in the community. For this project artist Gareth Gowran engaged with the group for just over a year from initial conversations, through to producing a finished piece of work.

This project was also concerned with creating a narrative based piece of work as the final outcome, again this type of work could be made in any media. The goal was to create a finished story that the group had adapted and developed from their own memories of the past, a story that represented them and what they wanted to say as authentically and effectively as possible. The creation of the story for The Blocks was facilitated by the artist and the group facilitator. The artwork and animation for the short film were all created by the artist and brought in to the group space for feedback from the participants.

The project uses the stages of art production, in this case animation, as a structure to mark checkpoints in the process for the artist, facilitator and group. Broadly these were pre-production, production and post-production. These labels are very specific to the animation/video/film

pipeline but I'm sure could be applied to other art and media techniques. We used these markers in the process to check in with the group to make sure the work being produced was representing who they were and what they wanted to communicate as authentically and effectively as possible.

An additional note on why we chose to use animation is that with this medium and the creation of a central imagined character it supported the ability of the group to remain anonymous if they wanted to. As the project developed and the work progressed the group made the decision to have their names attached to the work which felt like a really important achievement in terms of ownership.

The finished film can be broken down into a series of separate scenes and this is what we'll use to describe some of the different creative processes we employed with the group during the project. Each section or scene can also be used as a jumping off point for discussion on topics relevant to the group.

6. About Rialto Community Drug Team

In 1992 the first community drug team in Ireland was established in Rialto as a result of the proposals set out in the government's Strategy to Prevent Drug Misuse (1991). In just over one year we will reach our 30th year!

The Rialto Community Drug Team is a community-based harm reduction response to alcohol and drug use in the local area and beyond. In brief, it is open access and low threshold approach to working with those who use alcohol and drugs, offering a range of psycho-social supports, inclusive, non-judgemental and user friendly. We are part of the Rialto Development Association based in St. Andrew's community Centre.

In a 'normal,' i.e. non-Covid year, the services offered by the staff team include a range of support:

- Daily drop-in centre offering twice-weekly dinners, breakfasts and snacks;
- Assessment and referral;
- Key working and case management;
- Counselling focusing on addiction, HIV, bereavement, relationships, chem-sex and other issues, community-based detoxification supports;
- Housing support and advice;
- Outreach;
- Holistic therapies and 'well-being' evenings;
- Community prison links support, weekly mindfulness groups, mental well-being groups, creative groups, women's groups, men's groups; and
- Family support and a systemic family therapy service.

The RCDT also currently hosts three HSE methadone prescribing clinics weekly and on-call needle syringe exchange outreach and support. All are welcome to attend the centre where a full spectrum of care, advocacy and support is offered.

Currently, we offer – by appointment – key working, counselling and where possible small support group work. New and existing clients can also access a combination of face to face and phone support.

Our services are funded by the HSE (Section 39 and Social Inclusion), the [Canal Communities Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force](#) and Dept. of Justice.

As well as working towards long-term de-stigmatisation and empowerment, in the medium term, we're engaging with service users in relation to the management and delivery of services and activities.

The RCDT is also committed to working collaboratively with our service users, other addiction services, social care, welfare and community agencies in the local area and beyond and we are actively engaged with the Canal Communities Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force. We are committed to adopting a community development approach in all our work recognising the need to work closely in genuine partnership with individuals, groups in the local community, and statutory organisations.

The current [National Strategy' Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025'](#) promotes:

'A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland, based on providing person-centred services that promote rehabilitation and recovery. A person-centred approach means giving people a say in their own treatment and supporting them to play a role in their own recovery. This approach also requires services to work together so that people do not fall through the cracks, as they navigate the different services required to meet their specific need'.

'The Blocks and its workbook are rooted in the person-centred approach while listening and acting in a creative way as part of their development and recovery. This will form part of our body of work in supporting clients while offering the learning to a wider audience and communities who will be able to access this material free of charge. Again, thanks to our funders for enabling us to make this happen.

The Rialto Community Drug Team's work is drug and alcohol targeted and evidence-based. It demonstrates tangible outputs and outcomes; contributes to the local drug strategy; addresses current gaps and local needs; and demonstrates clear links with the priorities set out in national and local drug strategies.

We look forward to serving the local and wider community for many years to come.

7. How to use this workbook.

In order to use this workbook we have divided the animation into 4 scenes. Although they are short they contain considerable depth in terms of issues and topics arising. It is very important to use this structure as a guide. We already have had interest from groups as diverse as alcohol support, family support, men's groups, women's education group, and mental health support groups. The most important factors are;

1. Create a safe and comfortable space
2. The facilitator(s) should be trained and experienced in facilitation skills, group work and ideally have an understanding of Training for Transformation, Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and/or building resilience.
3. Know the limits of what the group can offer and have a referral pathway for those seeking additional therapeutic or other support.
4. Have clear expectations from the group participants and be realistic with what the group can offer.
5. The questions provided are the ones used in the original group in a natural way at the group's pace. So remember there is no one 'formula' for this. Only use the questions that you feel are appropriate for your group.
6. Take your time! These four scenes took over a year to develop! So a group might stay focused on one scene for a number of weeks (or longer).
7. The context is important. The Step by Step group was a family support group ran as part of an addiction service in a community setting. All groups have access to our key-working, family therapy, counselling, holistics and drop-in services which supported their engagement in this process. Your location, supports and context will perhaps determine the nature, depth and structure of the group.
8. At the beginning this was an open group however as time passed we closed the group to new members as the process had started and there was a level of personal sharing that needed protecting. The length of the group should be determined by the facilitator in agreement with the members taking into account the resources of the project.
9. A two hour session with a 15 minute break once a week worked for us.
10. The development of wanting a creative expression of the group work came from the facilitator with the support of the members and the project. This does not need to happen for the group to be successful.

11. We have included some information that you will not find useful or necessary. So we have broken up each scene into 'Issues', 'Questions', creative activity' and 'technical background'. Use whatever works best for your group.
12. The narrative based creative approach can be approached through any artistic medium not only film/animation.
13. In the appendices we have added some resources, information and exercises which you may find helpful. In this digital format we will be able to add more as time passes.
14. Simply put, before you start a group using this resource ask yourself;
15. Can you or your project address and support the issues that will most likely arise?

A Note on Character Creation

We decided that we would consolidate the experiences and memories of the group into a single character. This character would act as a cipher for the group which allowed them to voice potentially challenging memories while still maintaining a safe distance for themselves from the representation of those memories.



For the beginning of our film we needed to introduce the character so we needed to find out everything about her. We used a creation exercise based on character design techniques where the group were asked to use their own words to describe the character in multiple ways; physical description, make-up of family unit and friends group, the characters personality, their interests, challenges and hopes. We talked this out in the sessions with the group and invited them to write down anything that occurred to them as well outside of the group. These details would form the look of the character that would be used in the film, it also served the purpose to root the character, Sissy as she was named, in the minds of the group. Sissy became more fully rounded and had a presence in the group space

so at certain times when attempting to relate difficult memories or ideas we could say things like; 'This happened to Sissy....' or 'Sissy went through this....'.



The Blocks Part One

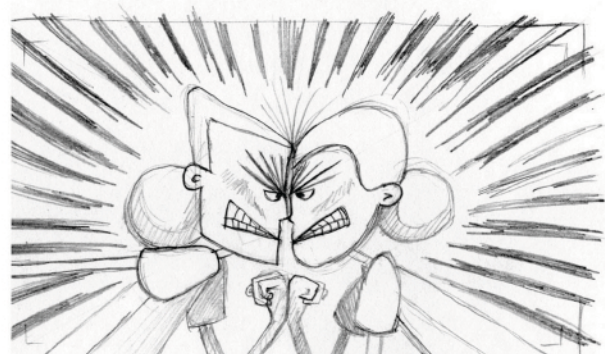
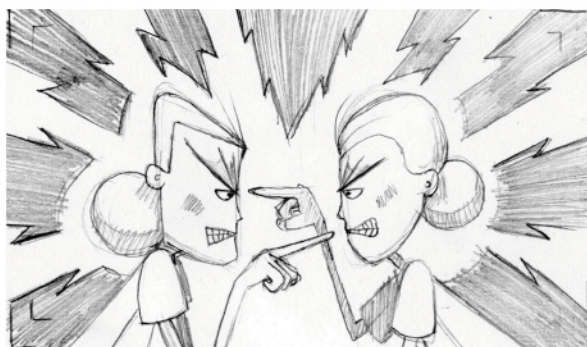
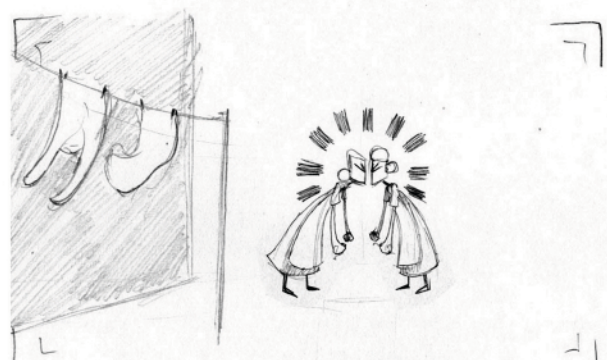
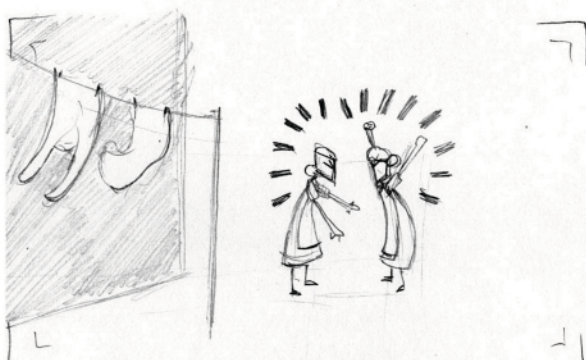
Scene 1. **Battle of the washing lines**

Issues arising:

Impact of the living environment, importance of play, first time people 'owned anything hall door, bathroom etc.' territorial, large families, no contraception, limited dreams- woman focused on being carers, nurturers, frustration in the home taken out at washing lines, power struggle within the flats, community and families (pecking order). Pride in cleanliness.

Questions:

1. What is happening in this scene?
2. What are the women fighting about?
3. Why are they angry?
4. What effect do you think this has on the children?
5. "Sissy says there does be murder in the flats"... what do you think she means?
6. Do you think these issues still happen in communities today?
7. Have you experienced this yourself?
8. What use does anger have? Sometimes people say someone has 'anger issues', what would you call it?



Creative Activity

In order to better understand the setting in which our film takes place we needed to speak about locations and how they looked but also what emotions were associated with them at the time and how the group felt about them now. As an aid to this we asked the group to bring in any old photos that they might have of family or friends from that time.

The photos would be used in the group as conversation starters. We would ask the members of the group to pick one or two specifically and say why they picked them, what was important about these photos to them. This is part of the process of placing value on their experience and on their voices, what they have to say is important and deserves to be represented creatively. It was also part of our experience with the Step by Step group that this activity can bring back up unexpected memories and recollections that the person was trying to find a way to express but needed the support of an object outside of themselves. This is not unlike the use of Sissy as an aid to speak about strong emotional memories.

Animation Location Research and Design

From the creative point of view this type of resource material is invaluable in that it will root the work in real points of view from the time period and from within the community that you're working with. The photos would have been taken by friends, family members or relations and would represent how they saw the people portrayed. They can also be used to build the production style, for instance if the photos are sepia toned this can be brought through to the finished piece.





The Blocks Part One

Scene 2. **Back and forth to the pub**

Issues arising:

Presence of addiction, alcohol, adverse childhood experience, poverty, roles of responsibility, choice, men's socialisation, and societal norms.

Questions:

1. How do you think Sissy felt having to run back and forth to the pub?
2. Do you think she had a choice?
3. Can you list the emotions and thoughts she had with her mother and later with her father in the pub?
4. What do you think Sissy should have done? Could she have done anything differently?
5. What do you think Sissy's father got from being in the pub?
6. What role do you think alcohol played in this scene?
7. What was normalised in this scene? Roles, alcohol, gender?
8. Did it play a big part in Sissy's life?
9. Why do you think Sissy's Mam was not also in the pub?
10. Thinking of this whole scene what effect do you think it had on Sissy's life?



Creative Activity

Our project was concerned with the impacts of addiction and in this specific case, due to the time period we were exploring, this centred around experiences with alcohol. So we engaged the group with the various levels of verbal interaction they would have experienced when the presence of alcohol was a factor; how they were spoken to; what they felt they could or couldn't say; the conversations they would hear; what kind of tone would the voices have.

In the case of our project the memories became centred around the home and the pub. The home represented the female experience and the female voice for the group while the pub represented their experience of male energy and the male voice at that time. This translated over into the script and also affected the design of the locations and the characters.



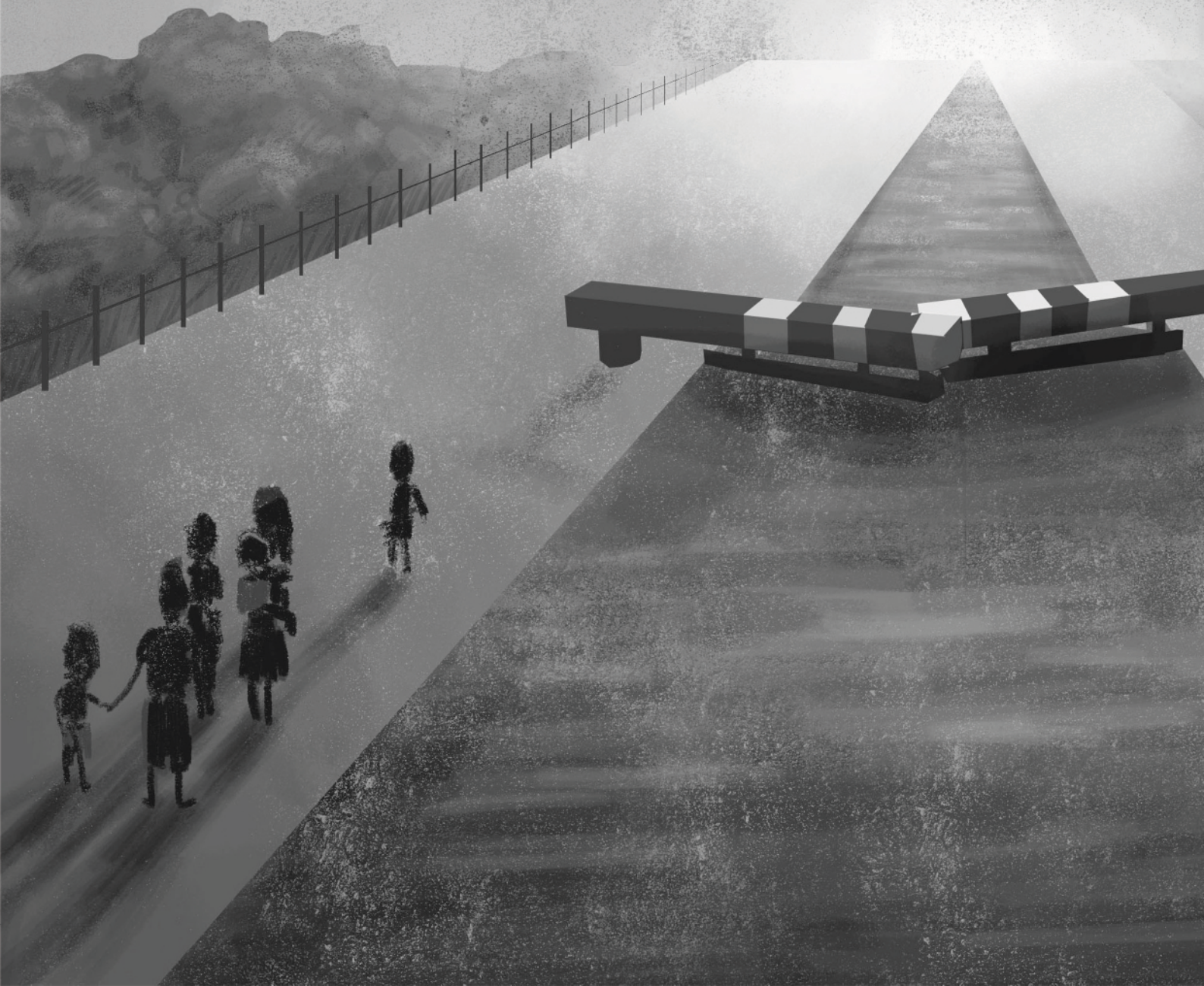
Animation Scripting and Dialogue

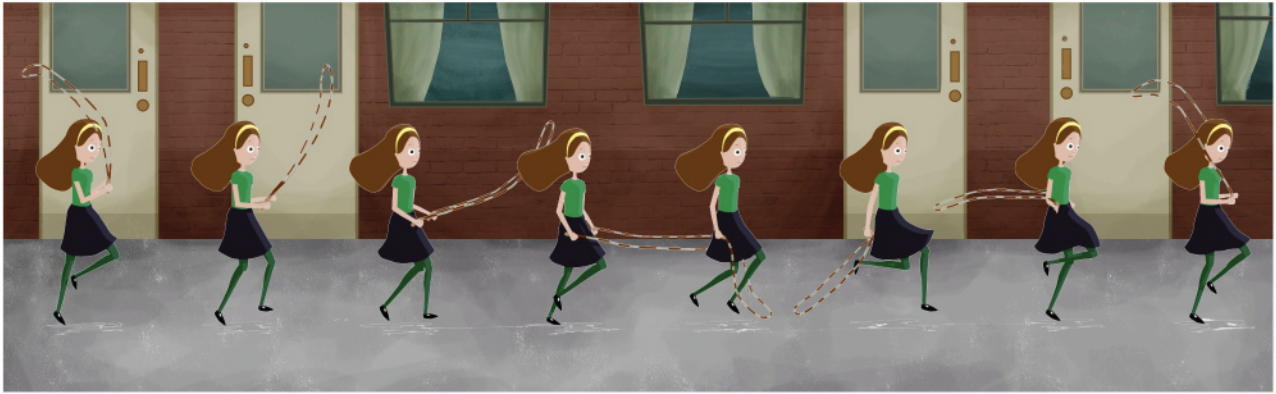
For the process of animation production a script needed to be produced with potentially a character or narrator speaking. To facilitate this we engaged in creative conversation around peoples voices and the words, phrases and rhythm of conversation they remembered and experienced from the time we were representing. This information would feed into the timing of scenes and the film overall.



The Blocks Part One

Scene 3. Out for the day





Issues arising:

Play, safe play spaces, escapism, boundaries, children given adult responsibilities, friendship.

Questions:

1. Who's responsibility was it to mind all those children?
2. How do you think Sissy felt minding that group of children?
3. Have you ever felt the burden of too much responsibility as a child?
4. If so how did you manage it and what would you do differently?
5. If Sissy could have changed anything that day what might that look like? What are the good parts and what would she not do?
6. How does being the 'responsible child' impact on later choices in life and relationships?
7. Is there anything here that mirrors something in your own life?
8. How important was play in Sissy's life?
9. What does 'play' or 'fun' look like in your life? How might you build regular safe 'play' into your daily or weekly life?



Creative Activity

A theme that emerged through the ongoing discussion in the group and exploration of their time as children was the duality of childhood freedom with adult responsibility. As a creative exercise we looked to describe the situations where this dynamic occurred most strongly. This generated short stories with very much a beginning, middle and an end all of their own in a complete way. A memory of a moment taken from a whole day might come up in the group space and we would challenge the group through gentle questions like; 'Can you take us back to the beginning?', 'What happened at the start of the day?', 'Who were you with?', 'How did you experience the time passing?', 'What did you feel like afterwards?', 'Did you understand what was happening at the time?'. In this way we worked with them to familiarise them with the methods of constructing a story and techniques for narrative exploration.



Animation Story Structure

Often in creative projects with a narrative requirement we need to look for the underlying points of opposition that exist alongside the more apparent physical challenges as we have to consistently bear in mind the emotional reasoning for our characters actions, no matter how small or large they seem within the world we've built. In this instance what emerged for the group was a personal contest within the character of Sissy between the desire and right to be a child through play against the responsibilities placed on her to look after her younger siblings as the eldest girl.

A 3D rendered scene with a checkered floor in the foreground and a dark cabinet on the right. A small table is visible on the left. The scene is lit from the top, creating soft shadows. The text is overlaid on the wall.

The Blocks Part One

Scene 4. **Shadow**

Issues arising:

Impact of addiction, resilience, helplessness, fear, abuse, violence, secrecy, safe adults, and 'perception of normal' i.e. "they are worse than us."

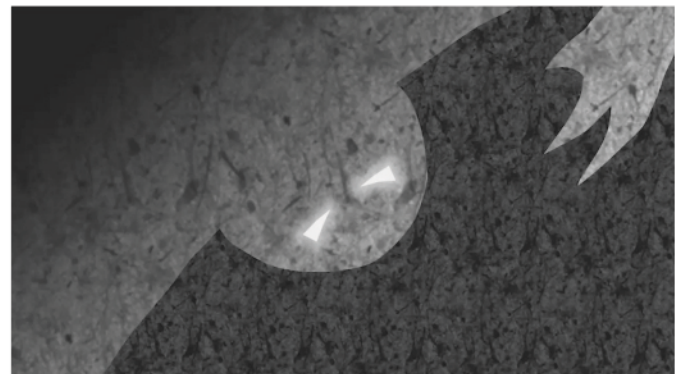


Questions:

- 1 How do you feel having seen this scene? Can you name some of the feelings?
- 2 What do you think was happening to Sissy and her friend?
- 3 What do you think Sissy wanted to say but couldn't?
- 4 What effect would this have on Sissy and her friend?
- 5 Who might Sissy have gone to about her fears and what she experienced?
- 6 How could this have effected Sissy's life and relationships into the future?
- 7 Do you think the same situation could happen today?
- 8 If Sissy was a child today could she have handled it differently?
- 9 Do you have people in your life with whom you feel safe to share your worries and feelings?

Creative Activity

We created a draft visual representation of the intended finished work and the group were asked in session to examine it and respond to it on three different levels; the accuracy or otherwise of the depiction of the physical spaces which they had described; what is their emotional reaction to seeing their words and their story represented; and does it actually work as a story, would a person watching this film understand what we were trying to say.



The goal is to develop tools for healthy critical analysis but also to make sure that the group feels ownership of the work. At each important stage of the creative process where a design or story decision would be made that affected the final outcome the group were involved in okaying it. All artistic and storytelling techniques and devices were gone through to support the group to understand and feel safe with the representation.

Animation Creative Analysis

As the work developed through the production phases; pre-production to production to post production the activities of the group moved from exploration to development to creative assessment. The ending of the film represented an attempt to bring together the threads which wove through the film and through the discussions within the group. This was supported throughout the process by continually checking in with the group and asking them their opinion on the creative work we were producing.



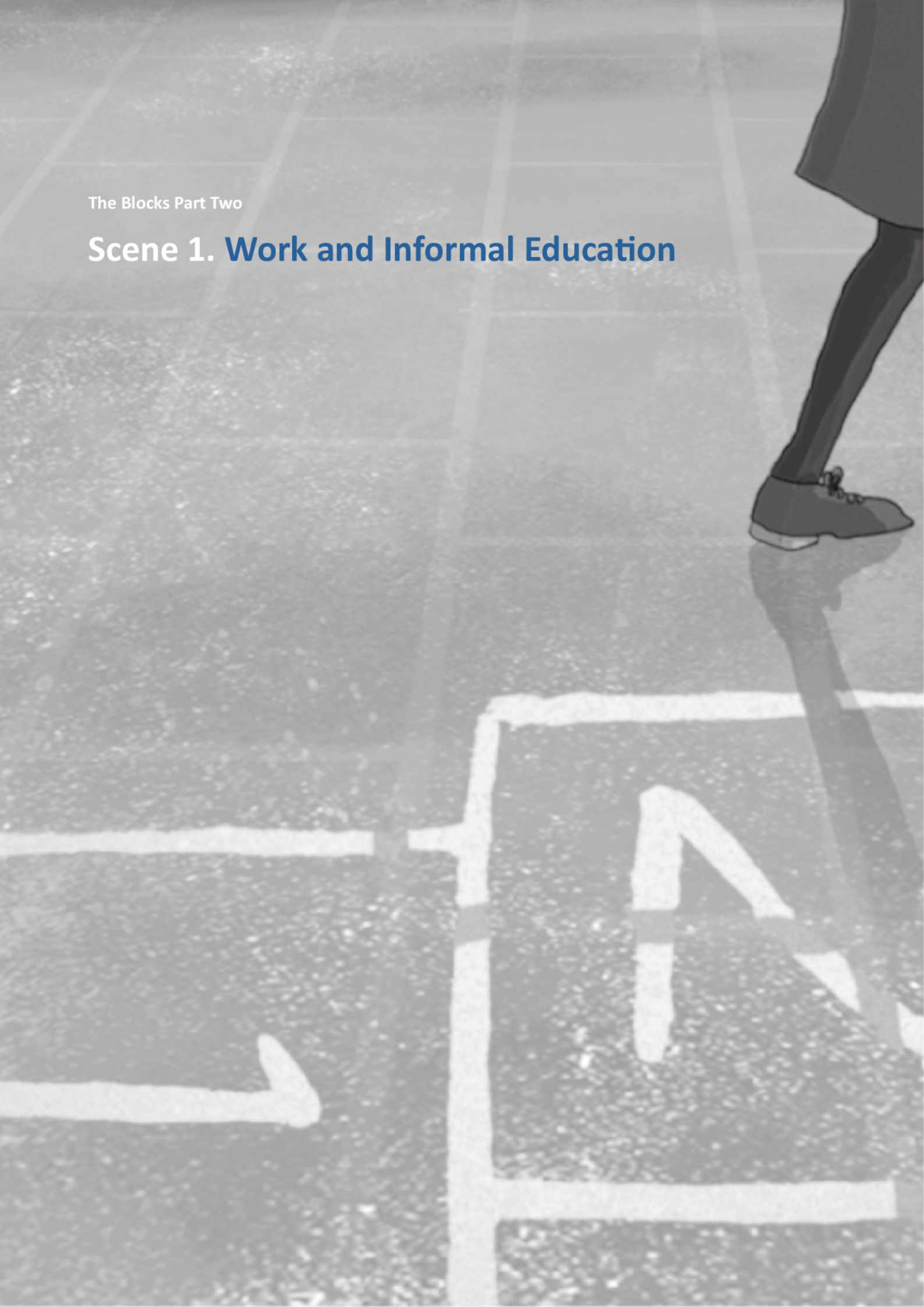
For instance, before final production began on creating the film, a draft version was created through the use of storyboards called an animatic. The storyboards were images of key moments in the film (about 400 were drawn for *The Blocks*) and for the animatic we placed them in sequential order with rough timing for each scene and simple sound effects. The equivalent to this for an art exhibition would be deciding on the layout and order that works would be displayed or if you were producing an illustrated storybook it would be the design and order of the pages.



While we have included technical information specifically related to producing an animation we wanted to make it clear that we believe the overall creative processes can be applied in multiple ways and could encompass techniques like book making, poster design, quilt making and sequential art, to name a few. What supported the creative outcome to be successful was the commitment to developing an authentic, cohesive narrative that the group felt complete ownership over.

The Blocks Part Two

Scene 1. **Work and Informal Education**

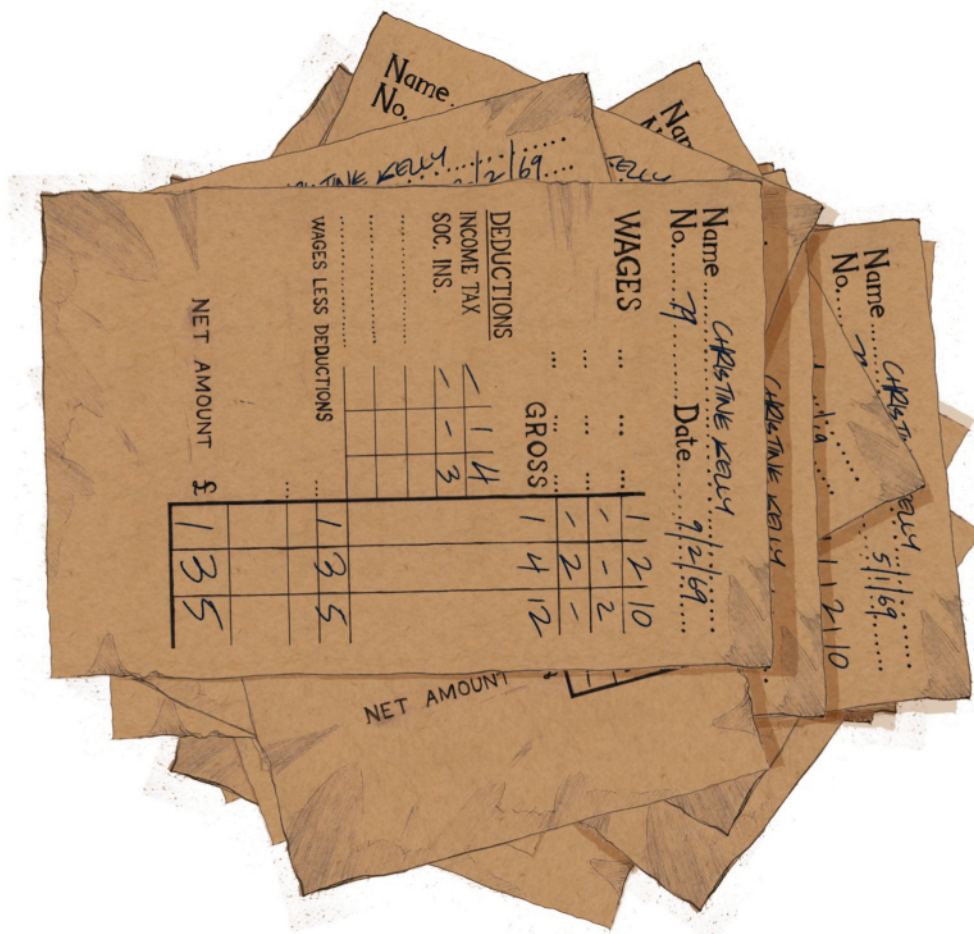


Issues arising:

Early school leaving, stepping into the adult world (at 14), child labour, becoming one of the bread-winners, becoming an adult too soon, does work offer freedom or is it a burden?

Questions:

1. What do you think of Sissy joining the workforce so early?
2. Even though Sissy was in the adult world, earning her own money, was she able to make decisions around it?
3. Do you know anyone in your family or community who left school at 14 and started work early?
4. Having watched this scene in the animation what feelings arose for you?



Creative Activity

This being a sequel short film to the first Blocks it was important to create a tangible and believable link to bridge the gap between the two films. This offers a ready-made opportunity to both engage in a reflection on the previous piece of work and start the new piece from a place of familiarity. We knew from the outset that we wanted the main story of the second film to be centred on Sissy around the age of 22. So the first creative challenge involved temporal storytelling, where the main goal is to communicate passage of time while not alienating the audience from the human story. So we looked for a common experience within the group which would have high relatability and for this group that was leaving school at age 14 and going to work. The routine of work offered us a way into showing Sissy going from teenage to young adult.



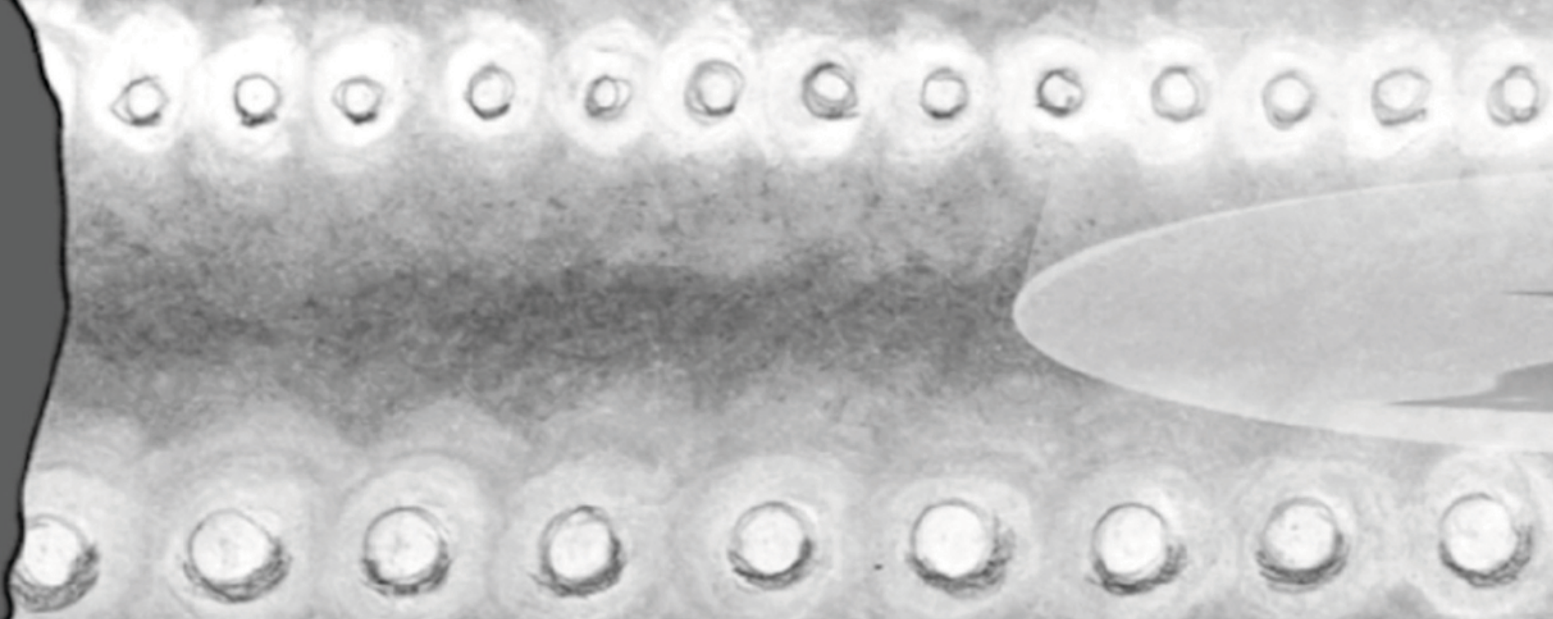
Temporal Storytelling

Telling a story or communicating around a theme which spans a significant period of time can be a sticky challenge creatively. It is a very functional and practical aspect of communicating a narrative so relatability can be lost as mentioned above. As well as the tool of finding a common group experience to give context to the jump another creative tool is to think of the blending between the past and the present. When we blend colours together, for example blue to red, we slowly reduce the amount of blue and increase the amount of red. In the exact mid-point we have an equal blend of the two, creating purple, a separate colour. If you want to try bring your group through a time jump try to find a starting point and an end point which can result in an entirely separate point of view in the middle.



The Blocks Part Two

Scene 2. **Social Life**



Issues arising:

Dressing for validation & confidence, alcohol, romance, belonging, friendship groups, peer pressure, looking for love, hopes and dreams, new beginnings, innocence of youth

Questions

1. Are teenagers the same today? Into fashion, looking good..?
2. Have you come across people who take drink or drugs to gain confidence (Dutch courage)?
3. Are people as innocent today as they were in Sissy's time?
4. How does social media and fashions compare today with people who lived in the 1960s?
5. What is acceptable today in socialising that wasn't in that era?



Creative Activity

As mentioned this second film is centred on a different time in Sissy's life. We made a conscious decision to change the art and production style of this short film from the first one. The first Blocks had a look of primary colours and simple shapes to mirror the child like view of the world. This second Blocks we went with a more complex colour palette and production style. We explored with the group their memories of the clothes, home decoration/furnishings and media of the time. This led to valuable information in fleshing out the world of the Blocks but this approach also offers side paths into memories and recollections which might not ordinarily arise. A lot of the stories gathered in this way contributed significantly to the finished script.

Art Style Research

In looking at the production design of this second short film we researched the style of animation that was prevalent in the period of time we were trying to convey. In animation of that era, classical hand drawn animation was dominant but there were more and more experimental studios growing during the 1960s and 1970s that we could draw inspiration from. Where the exploration mentioned above grounds the production from the local perspective, the art style research helps place it in the cultural context, further deepening the possible immersion into the story you're trying to tell. This can be applied to any medium.



The Blocks Part Two

Scene 3. Relationship and Marriage

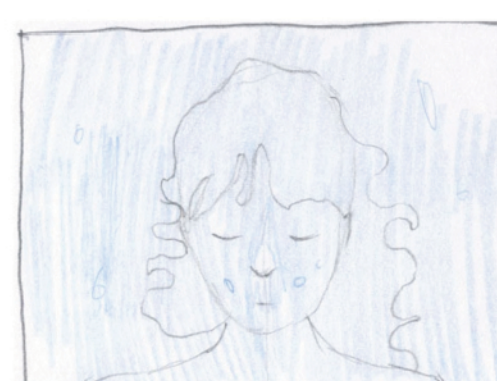
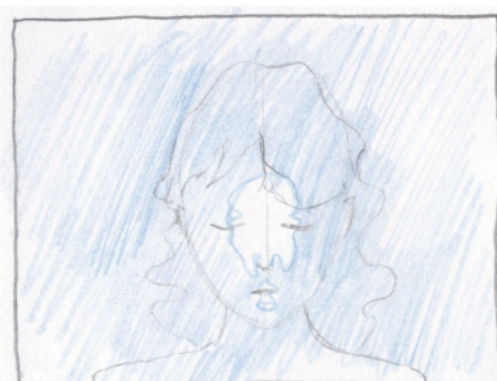
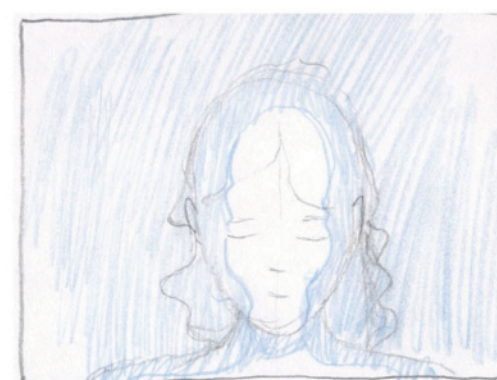
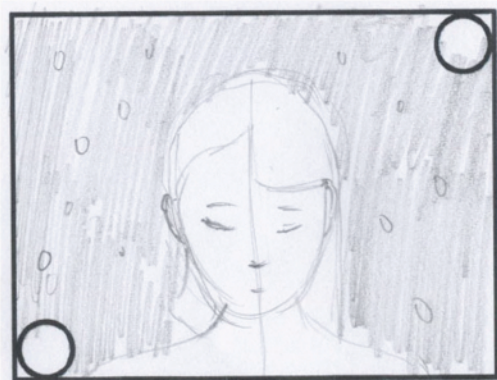
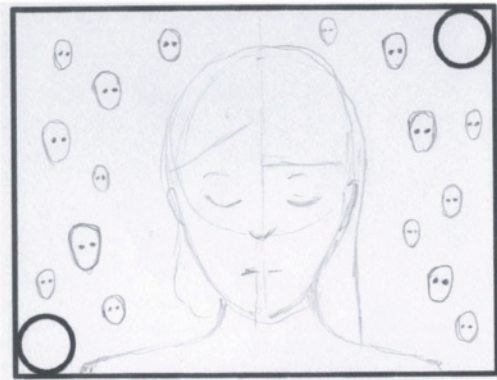


Issues arising:

Choice, expectations, outcomes, being trapped

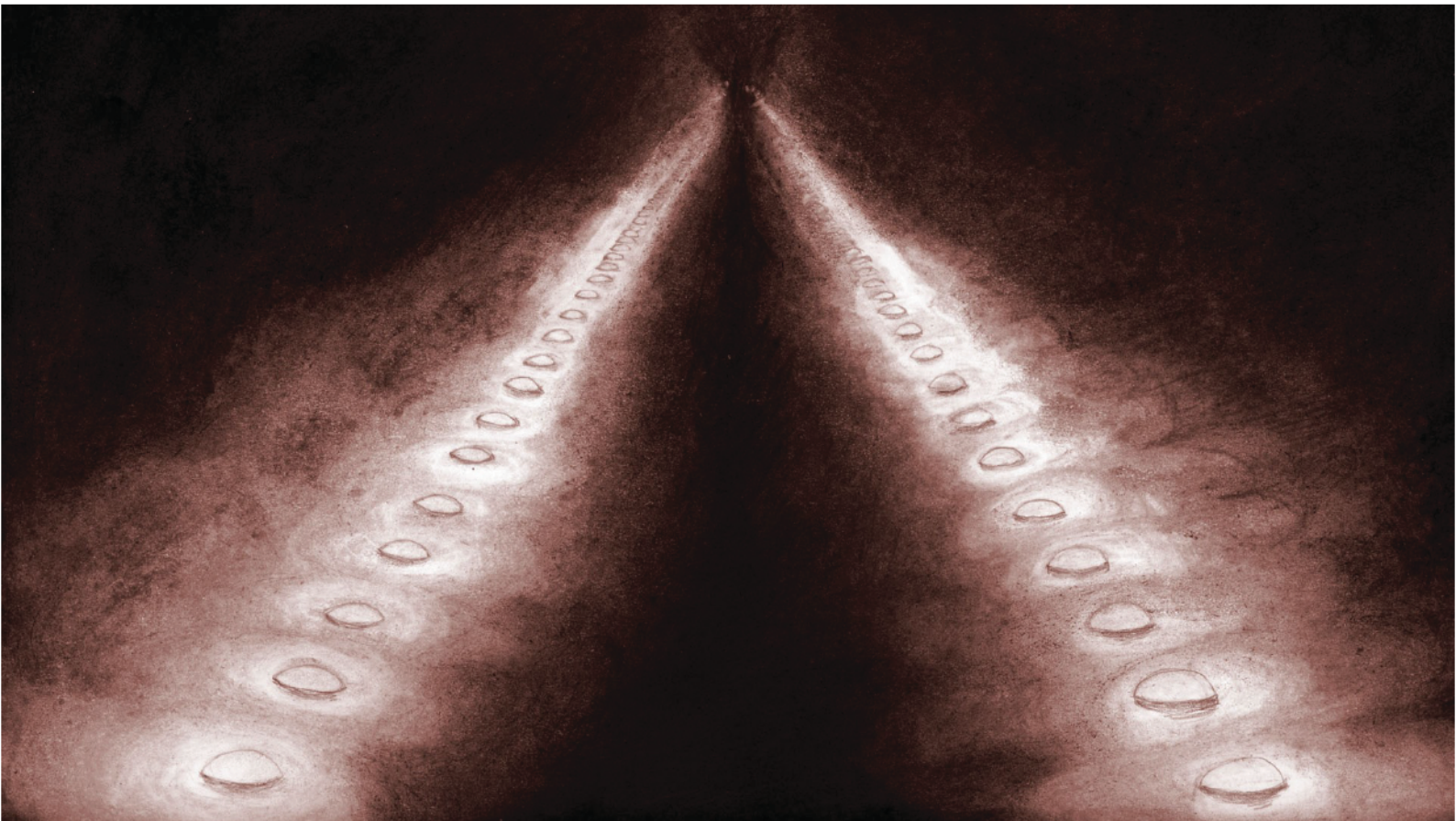
Questions:

1. Do you think Sissy was prepared for marriage?
2. What choices did Sissy have when she was told she was getting married?
3. Did Jimmy have a different expectation/idea of marriage? Why?
4. What changed in Sissy's love fantasy about her life?



Creative Activity

While working with the group on this film, the phrase, 'We had no choice', or something similar was repeated in relation to a lot of the issues we were tackling. From the creative side of things we knew we had to embrace this truth so we introduced the idea of using repeated motifs to represent repetitive patterns. In this short film these took the form of using conveyor like movement to communicate the lack of choice to get off or stop. We also used constant movement of the characters themselves to communicate the pressure to maintain that momentum. This offered us an opportunity to use contrast with still moments as well.



Repetition

Repetition can be a powerful tool in any creative medium. Used consciously it can communicate to a viewer what a group is preoccupied with. It can also tell an audience what the group thinks is important. The hard work of putting together any creative piece or exhibition tells someone, I value this, whether that's an idea, a point of view or challenging an issue.

The Blocks Part Two

Scene 4. **Mary**



Issues arising:

Friendship, family support, domestic violence/trauma, lack of sex education

Questions:

1. Why did Mary not tell her parents that she was pregnant? Why did she keep her pregnancy a secret? Why was she afraid?
2. Why was Mary alone/unsupported?
3. What would Mary's outlook on life be?
4. What were her dreams and hopes?
5. How would society treat Mary today?




Creative Activity

In discussions with the group it became apparent that Mary would need to become more of a presence in this film to try to encompass the many different lived experiences. We intentionally created a duality between Sissy and Mary. With Sissy she is more able to follow the prescribed path whereas Mary's trauma experience leaves her more open to adverse experiences. It was important to mirror the paths of the two characters while showing the common experience of female oppression and being kept in ignorance were still present for both of them.



Duality

Duality in storytelling can often mean good versus bad, strong versus weak, a tension between opposing forces. But when dealing with complex issues it can also be used to explore two different experiences of the same occurrence. If a subject matter or theme begins to take on complexity, it is useful to remember that we can create new ciphers to help a group through the different strands that might arise.



The Blocks Part Two

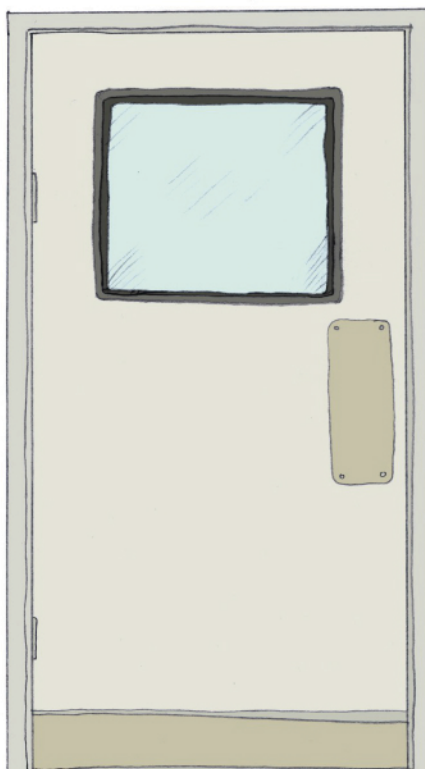
Scene 5. Sex Education

Issues arising:

Duty, good wife, shame and sex, sin, pregnancy, judgement, pressure to keep up to people's standards, social norms, stigma and guilt

Questions

1. What were the standards Sissy had to live up to and do they matter today?
2. Do social norms play a more important role than women's health today?
1. Why did Sissy feel judged?
2. Why were others allowed to make decisions and judgements around women's bodies and femininity?
3. Why was Mary treated differently?
4. What was the difference in Sissy's and Mary's pregnancy? (Hidden? Married? Unmarried?)
5. Jimmy was not allowed at the birth of their child. How do you think he felt about that? What was the difference of his role compared to Sissy's?
6. Why was the relationship between Sissy and Mary so important?



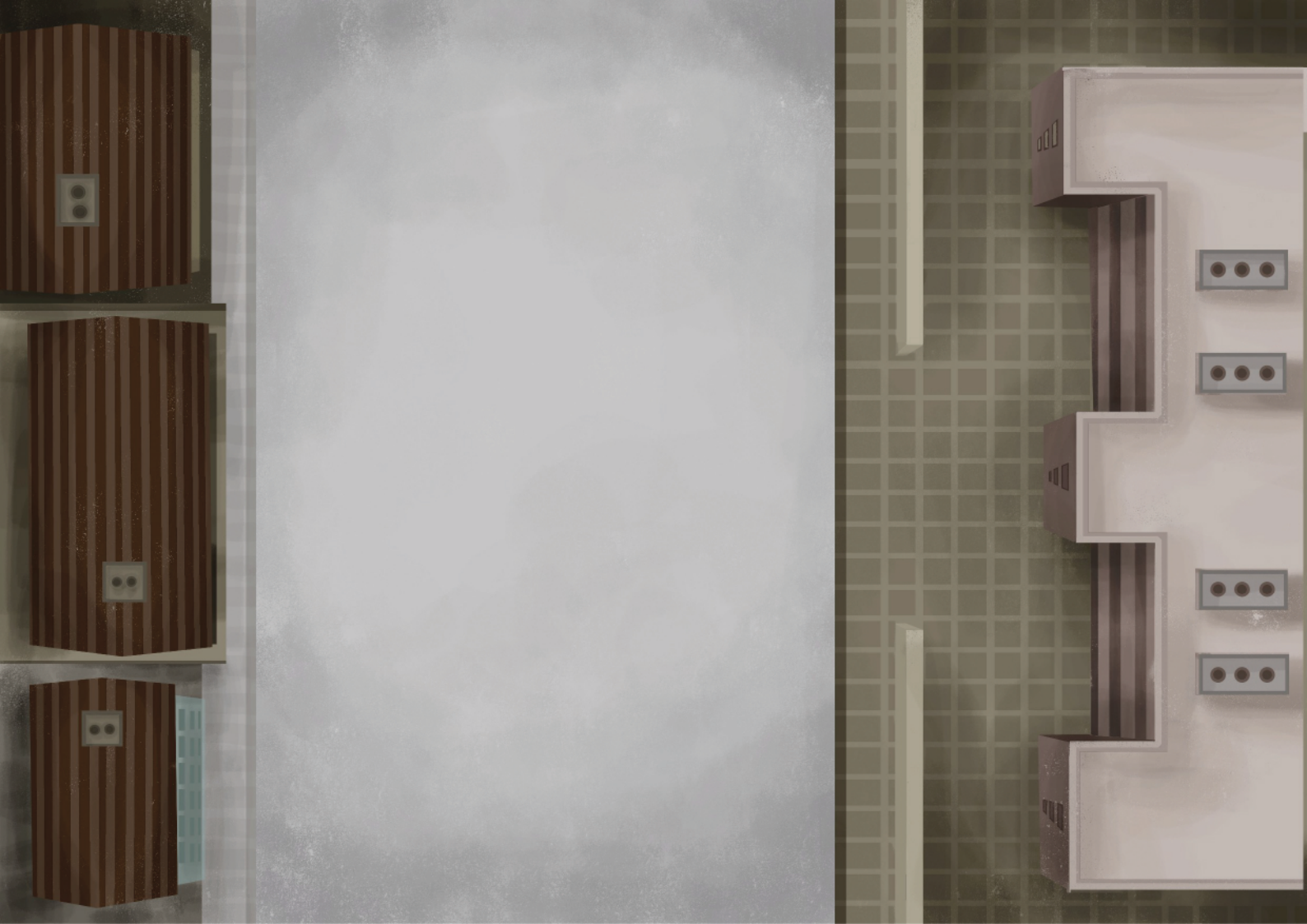
Creative Activity

In creating the ending for the film we were conscious of the tone we wanted to strike and the feeling we wanted to leave the audience with. Working through it in the group the dominant feeling was one of female solidarity, honouring the partnerships they formed in adverse circumstances. What became important in discussing this was facilitating the group to inhabit the knowledge they have today and speak in that present day voice to explore the difficult memories. We encouraged the group to fully understand the narrator role in its creative capacity. The benefit of speaking of something with distance and sitting into being the authority of their own lived experience.



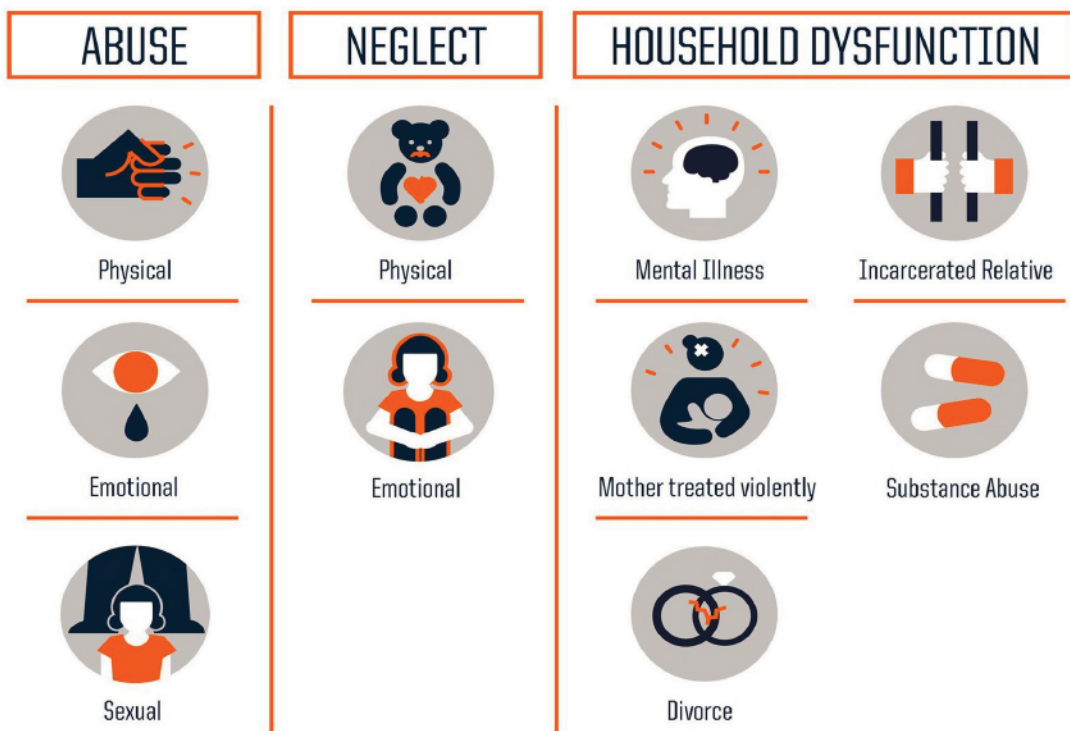
Narrative Voice

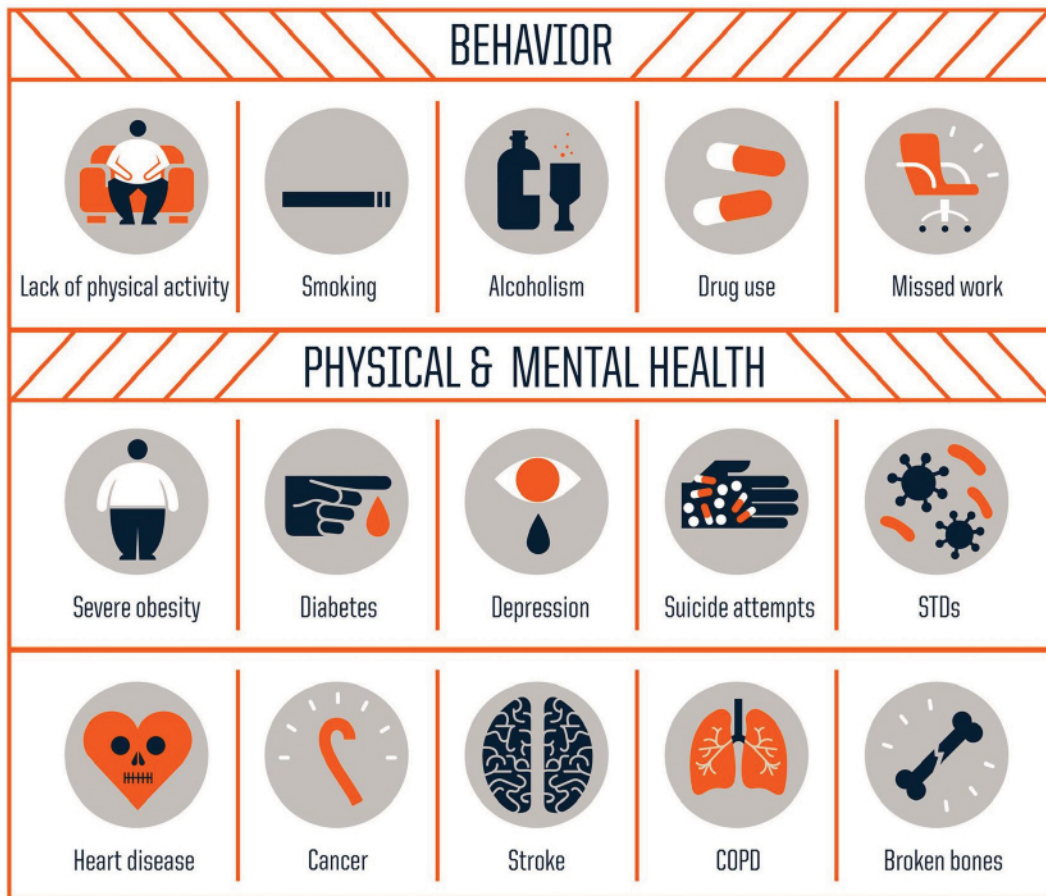
The use of narration in both films and other work of this type we've completed remains a very potent and flexible creative device. A narrator can at one time embody the authenticity of the groups lived experiences and speak with authority to an audience. And at the same time be personal, relatable and humorous, communicating the personality of the group. In preparing any type of work for viewing or exhibition it can be an enjoyable creative exercise with the group to imagine a character of both authority and personality and what they would say about the work to an audience. It can be a useful cipher to help prepare a group for a public event.



8. Appendices

8a. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)





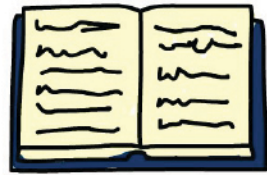
- **What are ACEs** (Merseyside Youth Association) <https://youtu.be/Z56mIO7Wk3U>
- **Nadine Burke's TED Talk**
https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en
- **Studies and report** <https://www.liverpoolcamhs.com/aces/ace-reports-studies-and-additional-websites/>
- **The film has been produced for Public Health Wales and Blackburn with Darwen Local Authority** <https://youtu.be/YiMjTzCnbNQ> This short animated film has been developed to raise awareness of ACEs, their potential to damage health across the life

course and the roles that different agencies can play in preventing ACEs and supporting those affected by them.

- **About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study**

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>

Trauma-Informed Practice.



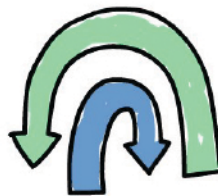
learning



behaviours



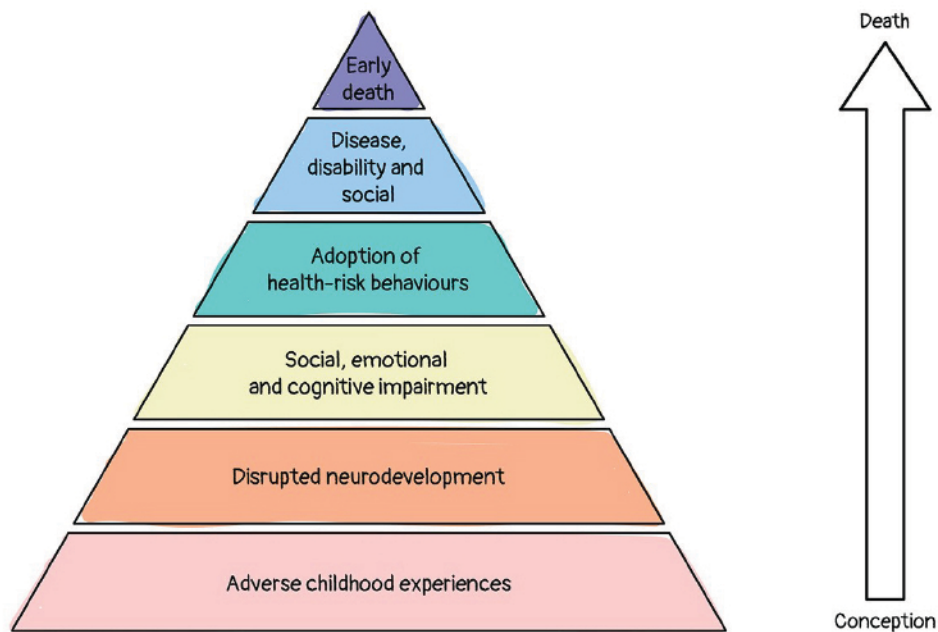
emotions



lifelong opportunities



physical health












































Images credit Merseyside Youth Association – Liverpool CAMHS

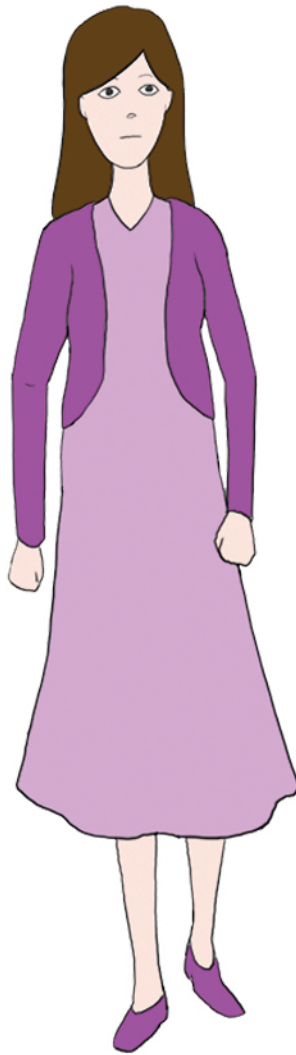
8b. Resilience

- **Original Resilience Framework** - Social enterprise Boing Boing, through research originating from Professor Angie Hart, www.boingboing.org.uk
- **Interactive Resilience Framework** An interactive version of the Framework that allows children and young people to independently, or alongside a trusted adult, work through various resilience-building tools www.resilienceframework.co.uk/
- **ACEs and resilience** – a short animation explaining ACEs and resilience <https://youtu.be/VXHZg1yq0CE>

Children & young peoples Resilience framework Aug 2017 – adapted by Merseyside Youth Association from Hart & Blincow with Thomas 2007

BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
 I have a good place to live.	 I feel that I belong.	 I like school.	 I understand the need for boundaries and rules.	 I believe in myself.
 Me and my family have enough money to live.	 I know my place in the world.	 I get on well with teachers and people who help.	 I can be brave.	 I try to empathise with others.
 I feel Safe.	 I know what things are good for me.	 I think about my future plans.	 I am good at solving problems.	 I am self-aware.
 I travel to where I need to go.	 I can keep friends.	 I like to plan what I am going to do.	 I like to make the most of the things that interest me.	 I am responsible for myself and my actions.
 I eat healthy food.	 I recognise my healthy relationships.	 I am proud of my achievements	 I can see things from another point of view.	 I have talents
 I have fresh air and exercise.	 I am able to maintain and keep good relationships.	 I aim to develop my skills and qualities.	 I can calm down when I need to.	 I get medical help when I need it.
 I sleep well.	 I have friends who support me.		 I can start again because I know tomorrow is another day.	
 I play and socialize with others.	 I know my responsibilities and what is expected.		 I have someone to talk to when I am unhappy.	
 I see that we are all equal.	 I know about my history and where I am from.		 I know how to have a laugh.	
	 I like to try new experiences.			
	 I can mix with others and make friends			
NOBLE TRUTHS				
ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

www.resilienceframework.co.uk



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**Canal
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**Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive**



**Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
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