

SO, WHAT HAPPENS



HARD EDGES
SCOTLAND

NEXT?

LANKELLY
CHASE

THE
ROBERTSON
TRUST



What do you talk about when you talk about change? How do you share your ideas for securing a better community for all? How has Hard Edges Scotland prompted conversation about systems change across Scotland

Credits

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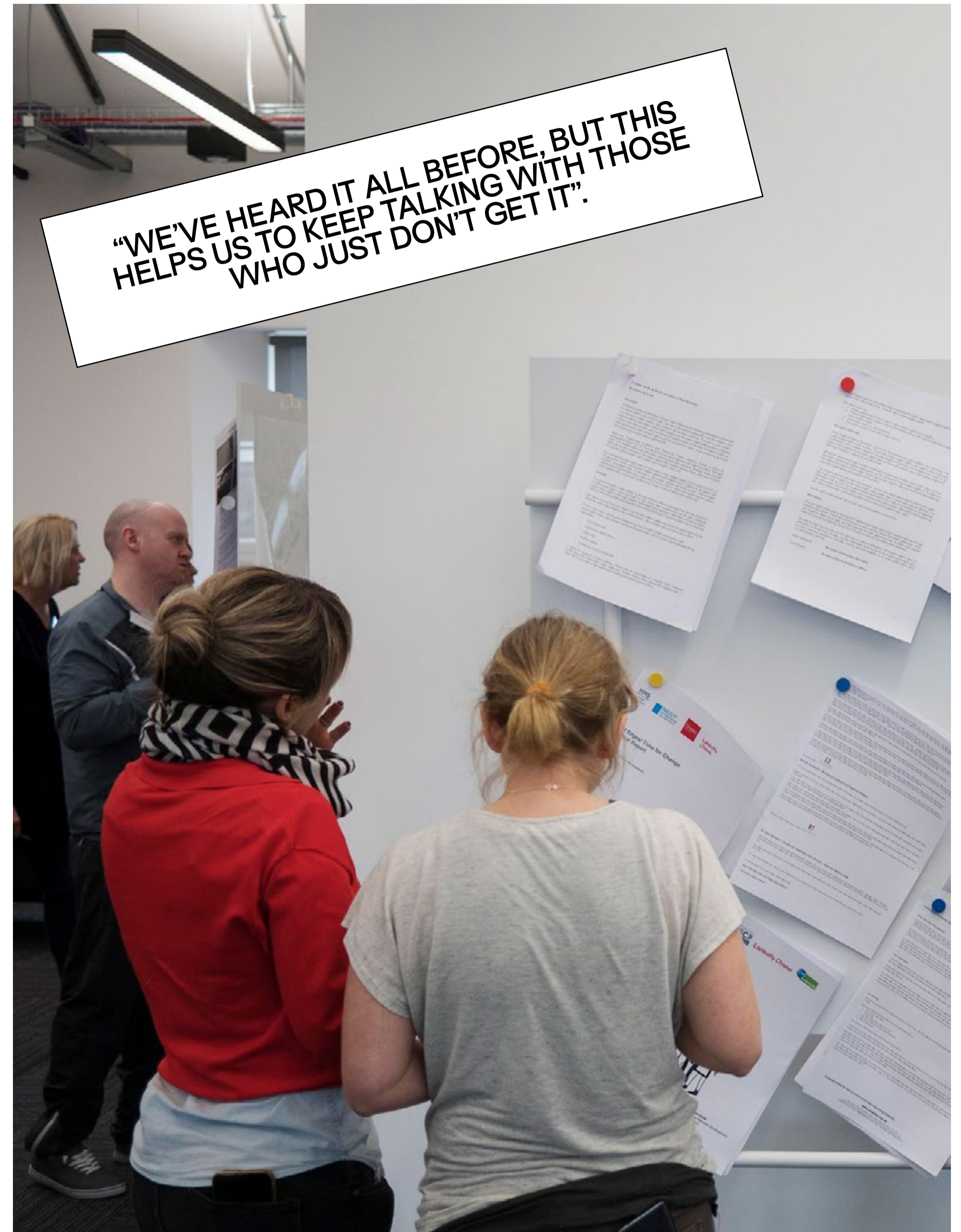
Hard Edges Scotland was born from a collaboration between Lankelly Chase and The Roberston Trust to bring together a range of quantitative and qualitative data, stories and experiences to help understand Scotland through the lens of five key indicators of disadvantage – homelessness; substance dependency; offending; mental health and domestic violence. It sought to promote the necessity of including evidence from lived experience and the frontline to inform, sense check and bring to life the need for systematic change.

Unlike too many collations of evidence, the publication of the Hard Edges Scotland report in June 2019 was not intended to

be the end of the journey. Instead, it was the impetus for new conversations about the issues identified to uncover new ideas and solutions. Micro grants funded an array of chats and changes inspired by the true stories the report told. An event was held in Stirling in February 2020 where people met to talk about how systems change could and should be possible. Excitement built that the conversation was getting louder and was being heard. A newspaper – this paper – was planned to give others the chance to hear what had been said and to join spaces where talking changed lives for the better.

But like so many, our conversation space was locked down when COVID hit. Time

seemed too short to talk of systems change – action was needed. And yet, as we hear of new challenges and we talk of the new normal, we still believe that the Hard Edges Report and the stories it tells still needs to be shared. This paper is a chance for you to hear where our conversations took us since the report was published. It is a way for us to reconnect with and reignite the conversation that needs to continue if systems change is ever going to happen. It is an attempt to share with others why and how we think CONVERSATION can make systematic impact. Talk is not cheap and it is certainly not always easy – but without it, things will never change.



What's so different about hard edges anyway?

— Hard Edges Scotland provides an evidenced call for a systemic approach to change in Scotland



In its own words:

“Hard Edges Scotland makes a renewed case for taking a whole system approach to severe and multiple disadvantage, with sustained and deep collaboration and coordination required at all levels. Individual services are contending daily with its impact, but individually they cannot provide the solution. It is also a compelling argument for involving people facing severe and multiple disadvantage, and their support workers, in work to change systems. It is they who bear daily witness to the dysfunctions that arise

from even the most well-intended policy. It is they who have learnt to navigate and survive the complexities of the systems we have created. And it is they who stand to gain or lose most from the results.”

We believe this call is even louder in these COVID times. Indeed, the Hard Edges statistics and stories are even more relevant since lockdown. In a society further traumatised by the impact of coronavirus and all its ongoing repercussions, perhaps the need to engage, discuss and even protest about these issues is more pressing than ever.

“Cutting across all of these findings was the fundamental inability of local and national service systems to address the needs of people who present with a range of complex and interacting needs, especially if accompanied by the challenging forms of behaviour that are often manifest in people coping with the long-term effects of sustained trauma including ACEs”

Action does not always speak louder than words – but we also know that words mean nothing without action.

**“I JUST NEED SOMEBODY
TO TELL ME THAT I’M
DOING THINGS RIGHT.”**



01

How did we keep talking about Hard Edges?

— Conversation only happens when people listen to and engage in it

After the report was published, communities were given access to micro grants across Scotland to encourage others to talk about Hard Edges and the issues it raised for them and the communities they were part of. Those who took part were given complete freedom to create events, seminars, gatherings and artistry in whichever way they chose. There was no requirement on them to report back on what was said – it was enough to know that the conversation was being had.

That sometimes proved difficult for our conversation partners to believe, so natural was it for them to work within tight funder guidance and meet demanding reporting requirements. It demonstrated to us how conditioned we are as a sector to having to account for and evidence output from our use of time and funds.

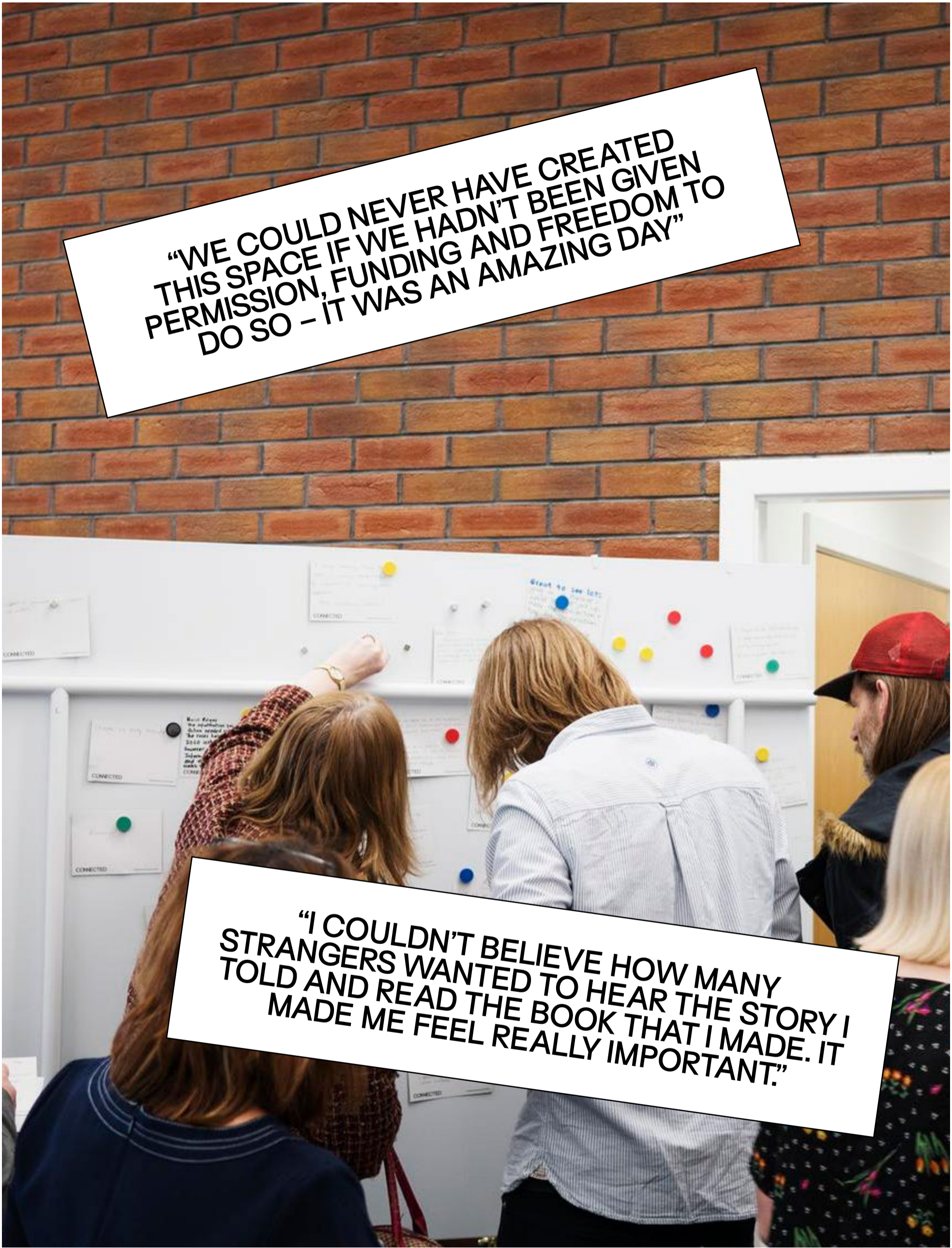
Many still chose to share with us what they heard when they talked. The diversity of events was inspiring. But we heard

common stories of how much people had learned from being part of the conversation, how attitudes and actions were being changed already as a result and how valued people felt by being included in the process. We also heard a loud, consistent and real challenge – would this conversation continue or would it be left behind like so many initiatives of the past?

Where the conversations took place in Scotland

Locations

- Angus Council
- Ayrshire Community Trust
- Cloudberry Communities CIC
- Clyde FC Community Foundation
- Corra Foundation (for Praxis Women)
- Culture and Sport Glasgow
- Dynamic Wheel CIC
- East Ayrshire Churches Homelessness Action
- East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- ENABLE Scotland
- Falkirk Council
- Health Opportunities Team
- Grassmarket Community Project
- Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership
- LEAP Sports Scotland
- Media for Communities
- NHS Ayrshire and Arran
- NHS Health Scotland
- Recovery Enterprises Scotland
- Scottish Drugs Forum
- Serendipity
- Turning Point Scotland
- Waverley Care



“WE COULD NEVER HAVE CREATED THIS SPACE IF WE HADN'T BEEN GIVEN PERMISSION, FUNDING AND FREEDOM TO DO SO – IT WAS AN AMAZING DAY”

“I COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY STRANGERS WANTED TO HEAR THE STORY I TOLD AND READ THE BOOK THAT I MADE. IT MADE ME FEEL REALLY IMPORTANT.”



“JUST TALKING IS WHERE THE GOLD CAME FROM”





Listen in to one of the conversations...



Praxis Women

— A collective formed with a determination to improve outcomes for women affected by substance abuse.

As a new grouping, its members admitted it would not normally be the “sort of place that gets grants” – without the micro-grant, this conversation would not have been possible.

What did they talk about?

Through word of mouth and trusted relationships, nearly 80 women met to consider a range of topics touched on within the Hard Edges report. Prompted and enabled by a number of creative arts and crafts approaches, they spoke about many things including identity, family and sex work as they drew, wrote and chatted with each other. In a safe, trusted and organic space, they shared stories and experiences of trauma, grief and abuse.

What enabled the conversation to flow?

The women who participated rarely get an opportunity to tell their stories. The conversations were not directed and the purpose of the session was not

to illicit information or inform research. Those facilitating the conversations have admitted they almost felt guilty about not being obliged to report what they heard to anyone – but they loved the lack of bureaucracy involved. The time and space enabled focus on one sole aim – to allow people to sit back, talk, listen, create and reflect with each other about their unique and shared experiences.

What did people hear?

We have been told that those attending were reminded that people do not suffer “indicators of multiple deprivation” in a silo-ed or unique way. By being given a safe space to talk and connect with others, women spoke of how they felt empowered by doing so. They reminded each other that “women need to stick together” and that “a day like this, all us women together, shows how powerful and strong we are xx”. One woman simply wrote “Loved Today xx”.

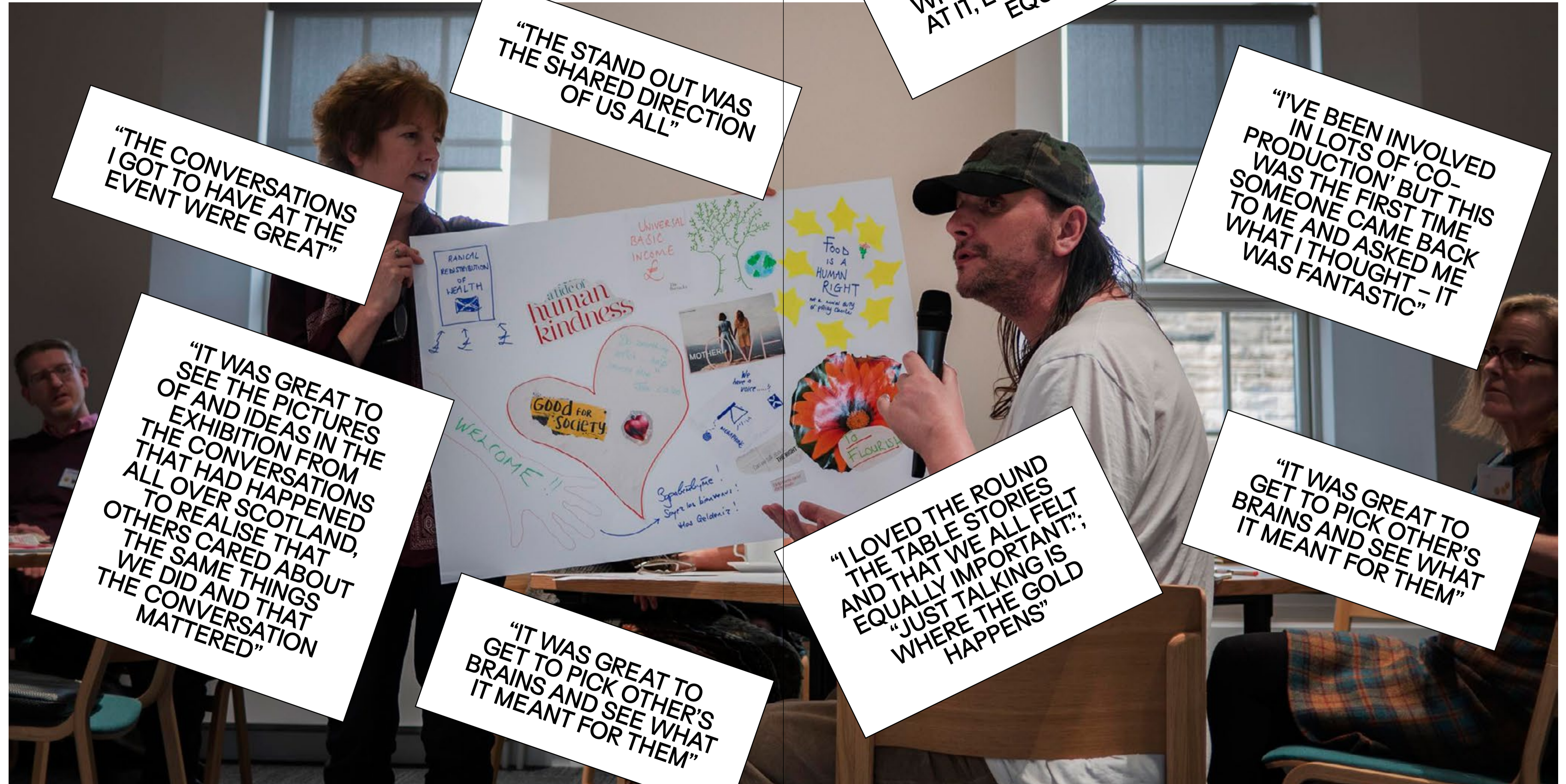
Why have a big conversation event?

— Conversation needs to be shared if it is going to be heard by others

To turn up the volume about the need for systems change, in February 2020 we invited people who had been involved in micro grant conversations to a larger conversation with funders, government officials and sectoral organisations to share their ideas, cross pollinate them and grow together. We believe that sustainable action doesn't happen in isolation – it is generated, refined and improved in a constant cycle through conversation and integration.



We wanted to demonstrate that conversation is not a one or even two way exchange but a cyclical process. We wanted to talk about how talk can make a real and effective difference to what we think, what we say and what we do. We wanted to give people time to talk; to listen; to hear; to understand; to question and to share this conversation with others. We people to hear how conversation is a necessary part of action. Here is what some of those attending had to say:



Making the conversation work

— How we modelled this conversation was as important to us as having the conversation

We wanted to ensure that everyone felt enabled to take part – because we need to hear their voices and have our ideas, biases and plans challenged. To facilitate this we had four main principles when planning the event:

- Accessible
- Equal
- Respectful
- Hopeful

We won't have got everything right, but here's how we tried to make this happen.



Accessible

Even in the pre-COVID times we were in, it was important to provide space for the conversations to take place on an accessible basis for all. We were fortunate to have use of The Robertson Trust Barracks Centre which allowed easier physical access. For those with hearing and visual challenges, we used microphones throughout and used icon-rich and text light images.

For those with anxiety issues or concerns, we ensured that the flow of the day did not require anyone to participate at every stage nor was anyone expected to go into groups on their own (or at all) if they did not wish to.

Space was provided for people to sit out if they wished. No-one was required to speak at any stage – it was an individual's choice to participate as and how they chose.

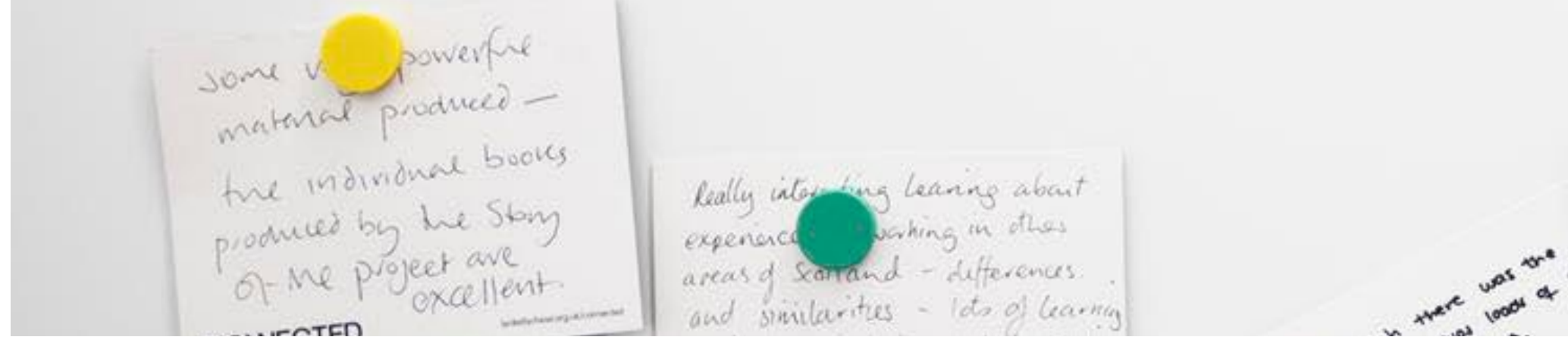
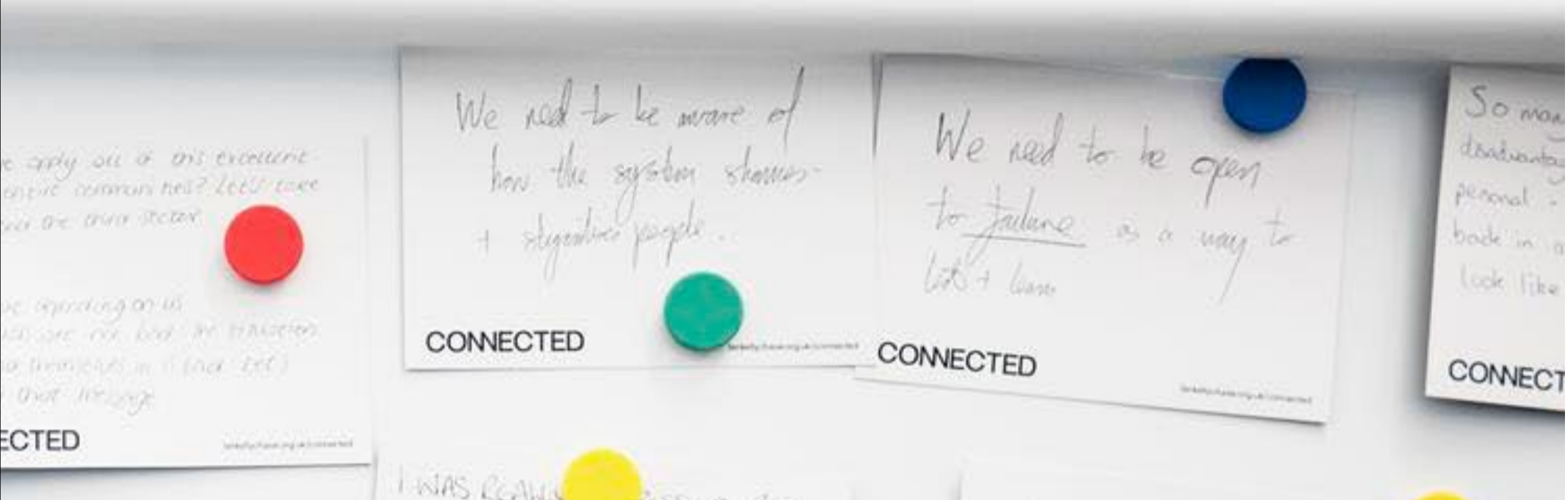
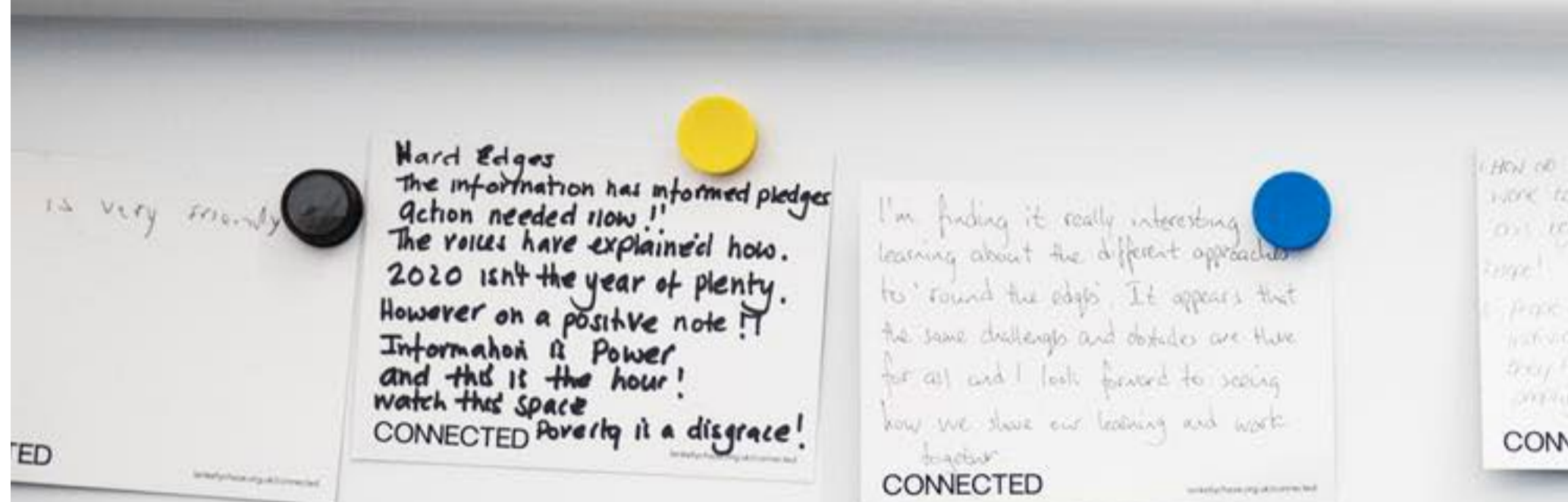
Equal

A conversation works best if all those taking part understand that everyone's opinion, experience and insight is of value. We had folk attending from Scottish Government; with a homeless personal background; from frontline services and from funders. Everyone was required to make their own name badge when they came in with their own name only (no lanyards allowed!) and no speaking privileges were granted to those who may have been considered to

be in a position of "power". Throughout the day, we ensured that groups were mixed and not isolated.

People who had hosted micro conversations could choose to tell others about what they had heard. To help them do so, we provided printing and display assistance to those groups that wanted to display any output they had if they asked for it. It created a stimulating and chat provoking exhibition and coffee space.

We used a story circle format for much of the day. The equality of speaking in circles meant that no voice was privileged over others.





Respectful

We were struck by how engaged all attendees were in the event and how interested they were in everyone's contribution. We believe this was partly achieved by providing the display space at the event where people could wander and look at what conversations had happened elsewhere without any need for people to stand at stalls and present/ speak to them. This allowed conversation and exchanges to flow more equally and freely.

In the middle part of the day, we had a story circle where people gathered to listen to hear what others had heard in the event so far. Those sitting in the circle came from

a wide diversity of different backgrounds and no voice "ranked" higher than others. It meant that those who wanted to share their thoughts were given the opportunity to be able to do so in a central and vital way. Everyone's voice was respected.

Hopeful

As we wish to be part of a conversation which engenders real systems change, we wanted to ensure that space was given for a conversation about what we were daring to hope for rather than the details of how we would get there. All too often, visioning a future where change has happened is avoided in conversation – seen as too optimistic, not practical, not very realistic,

too difficult. However, by taking a creative approach, we allowed time for people to talk about the future they were hoping for. They had a conversations about what a No Edges Scotland looked like for them – and what they wanted to tell others about it. The groups created adverts for their No Edges Scotland which resulted in a buzz of determined optimism in the room as we talked, listened, heard, questioned and understood each other in the room.

So how do we take this conversation forward? How do we start taking the steps towards a No Edges Scotland? That was the loud and clear challenge that was left for all of us to address.

So what did we talk about and what did we hear?

— Questions are as important as the answers we get

Some might say that the third sector suffers more than others for having to prove that actions taken, resources invested and time committed produced measurable, reportable and effective results. After all, it's only human to ask – so what?



What have we got to show for this investment of money, creation of space and provision of time for conversation across Scotland? Clearly life has not yet changed for those living at the hard edges of our society – so what was the point of all this chat?

Too often we feel obliged to provide answers but what we are learning is that systemic change needs as many questions to be asked as action taken if it is to be effectual. It is often in the questions rather than the answers we might hear the challenges, understand the lived insights and test the proposed solutions.

Instead of trying to give answers, then, we wanted you to hear the central questions that emerged from listening in to these conversations across Scotland about its Hard Edges. We'd like you to ask yourself

what your answer to these questions are. We'd like you to ask others what their response might be.

It can be scary to admit that we don't know the answers to these questions. It can be risky to accept that by opening up to these issues, we are admitting that others may know better than us. It can be unsettling to return to conversations which are continually challenging. But our experience of our Hard Edges conversations is teaching us that by talking, listening, hearing, understanding and questioning we are better placed to take action that can – and will – change lives.

• **Why is it so often the case that those “in power” control the conversation when those who live at the Hard Edges understand the issues better than anyone?**

- **If actions speak louder than words, is conversation only a way of avoiding actually doing something?**
- **Can sharing experiences from different walks of life help others believe that systematic change is possible?**
- **What can we do to help folk share their insights when they don't believe anyone will listen?**
- **Who isn't engaged in the conversation – and why are they not listening? Is there something we can do to change this?**
- **Is it unrealistic to believe in a better future – and what does that future look like for everyone?**

So is it all talk and no action?

— Good conversation needs to be engaging – but it also needs to be challenging if change is going to happen

We heard that people want the Hard Edges conversation to continue. We know that for system change to happen, there needs to be a blend of quality conversation and informed action. But since our February conversation, we have been reminded far too effectively that events often over-take the best of intentions.

The desire “to do” – to help, to work and to make things happen often means that the conversation goes unsaid and unheard. Like many, we have found it hard to establish spaces and places where we allow ourselves and others time to talk, listen, hear, understand, question and share in an accessible, equal, respectful and hopeful manner.

The ongoing pandemic has undoubtedly provided a challenge in creating physical spaces for conversation to happen. To what extent, however, has it provided an excuse? Voices must not go unheard; stories must not go untold; spaces for conversations must continue to be created – in whatever form and in whatever medium events allow us. We intend to keep the Hard Edges conversation going – and we would like you to be part of it.

As part of Challenge Poverty Week 2020, The Robertson Trust were delighted to host a virtual conversation amongst a group of people who all approach Hard Edges Scotland from different angles and with different experiences but with equal passion. We asked them to share with each other if and how they felt that talking might help enable and inform real and effective systems change. That conversation was listened into by dozens of people across Scotland who wanted to hear what others had to say and then share with each other what they had heard. It demonstrated that even in this socially distant age, conversation can keep us connected – and challenged.

It reinforced to us that others across Scotland see the need



to keep the conversation going. It confirmed our belief that conversation is in itself a necessary and positive action. You can read more about it on [The Robertson Trust website](#)

and listen again to what was said [here](#).

We heard people say:

"I DON'T WANT MY VOICE TO GO UNHEARD"

"OUR WOMEN WILL WANT TO KNOW THAT THEIR TESTIMONY HAS ACTUALLY DONE SOMETHING, THAT THEY'VE MADE A DIFFERENCE"

"IF ENOUGH OF US TALK ABOUT THIS, THEY WILL UNDERSTAND"

"WE NEED TO REFRAME HOW WE INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER COMPLETELY"

"WE'RE ALL JUST PEOPLE"

"WE NEED TO MODEL THAT WE'RE ALL PLAYING ON THE SAME FIELD AND THIS IS WHERE IT IS AT"

"YES, BUT WHAT DO THE FUNDERS THINK NOW?"

"WE NEED TO CHANGE THE NARRATIVE"

"STORIES CHANGE THINGS"

"NOT EVERYONE HAS THE PASSION FOR CHANGE, YET"

"WHAT WILL ACTUALLY GET ACTIONED OUT OF THIS"

Stay involved

- Read the report [here](#)
- Read about the event [here](#)
- See video from the event [here](#)
- Share this doc [#letstalkaboutHES](#)
- Join the mailing list [here](#)
- And of course we invite you to start your own conversations



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