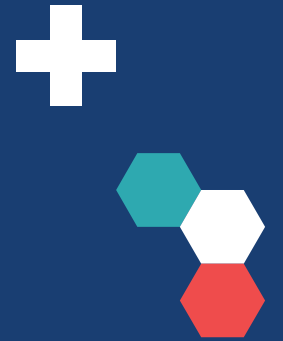


Building ideas: Using creative and inclusive techniques in research



Thursday 6 November
12-1pm



Agenda

- **Creative methods in research: an overview**

Lucy Condon, PPI Facilitator, NIHR ARC West

- **Exploring young people's views on data sharing using LEGO!**

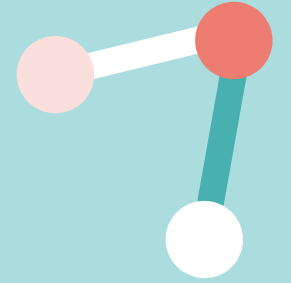
Ahlam Sawsaa, Research Fellow, Health Determinates Research Collaboration

- **Sandboxing as a creative method: potentials and ethical challenges**

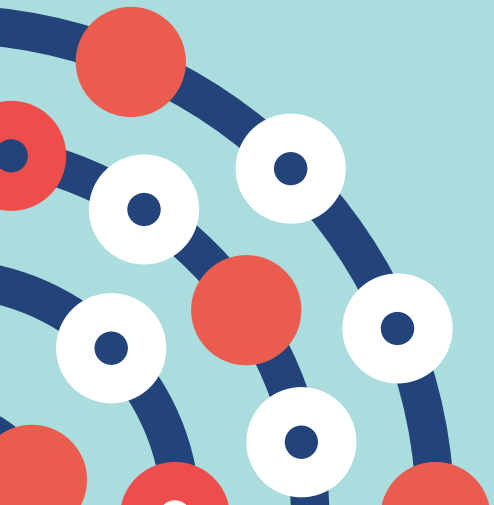
Debbie Watson, Professor of Child and Family Welfare, University of Bristol

- **Exploring how technology could be used to address loneliness using creative methods**

Lis Grey, Behavioural Scientist, NIHR Applied Research Collaboration West



Creative methods in research



Why use creative methods in research?

- Relationship building
- Aiding discussion
- Balancing/sharing power

Bristol YPAG using creative approaches



Exploring young people's views on data sharing in creative inclusive way using LEGO!



Ahlam Sawsaa - Research Fellow
Health Determinates Research
Collaboration - HDRC





Aim and objectives

Aim

This project aimed to understand how young people feel about their routine data being collected and used in routine systems (e.g., health, education).

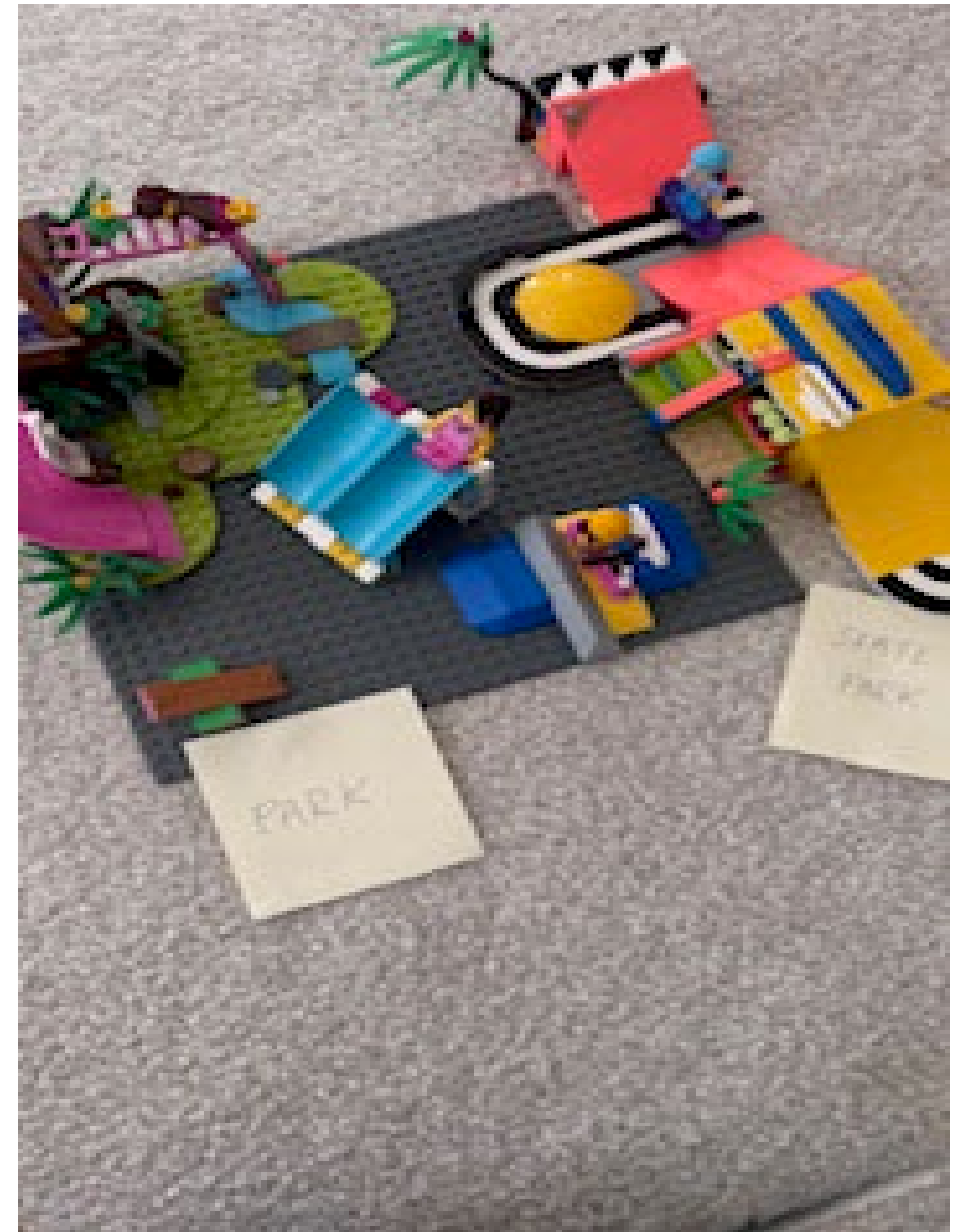
Objectives

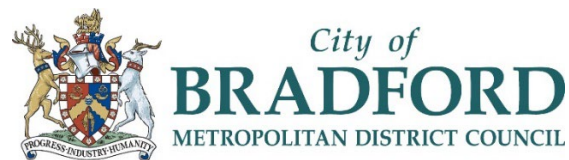
Explore how creative tools can support young people in expressing their views and engaging in dialogue about the collection and use of their routine data for research.

Group build activity

Build something in your neighbourhood that makes you feel happy.

- 15 minutes

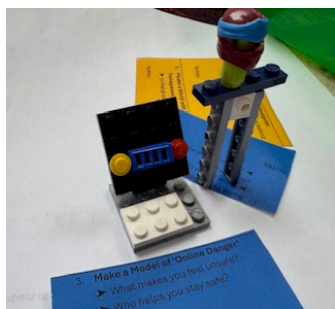
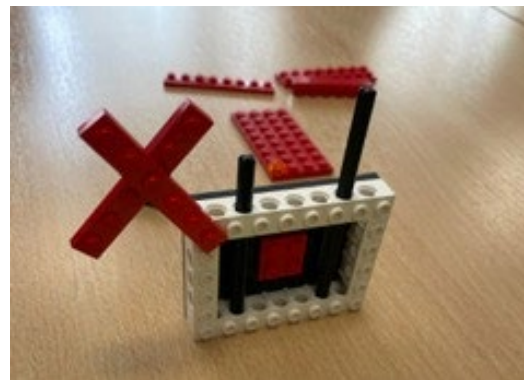




Individual build activity

Build something that makes you feel safe or unsafe about sharing your data.

- 2 minutes
- 10 bricks



NIHR | Health Determinants
Research Collaboration
Bradford

Sharing and reflection

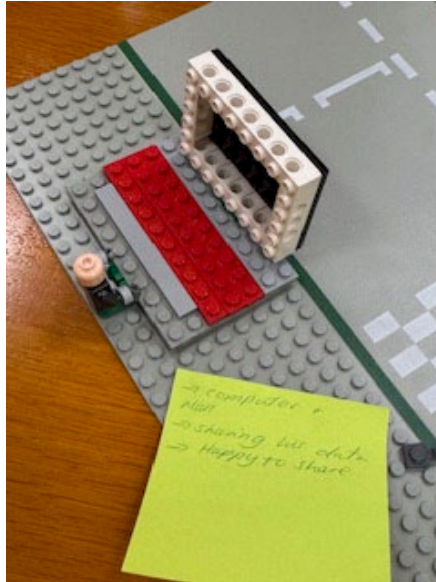
What does
this
represent?

How does it
connect to
health?

What
surprised
you?



What we learned from young people



Why LEGO?



When to use Lego?



Public
engagement
activities



Research
methods



Workshops



Focus
groups



Community
activities and
events



'Getting to know
you' sessions



Schools



Guide



Have a research question



Consider your aim / objective



Think of something 'easy' to build first, so people build their confidence



Give your first direction 'build...'



Takeaways

LEGO makes complex issues visible

Challenges:

- Data privacy concepts can be complex needed plain language and relatable examples
- Time constraints meant some deeper topics couldn't be explored fully

Reflections:

- LEGO helped break the ice and brought out ideas that might not have surfaced in a traditional discussion



Reference: [The Toy Brick as a Communicative Device for Amplifying Children's Voices in Research | M/C Journal](#)

Dr Emilia Trapasso LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

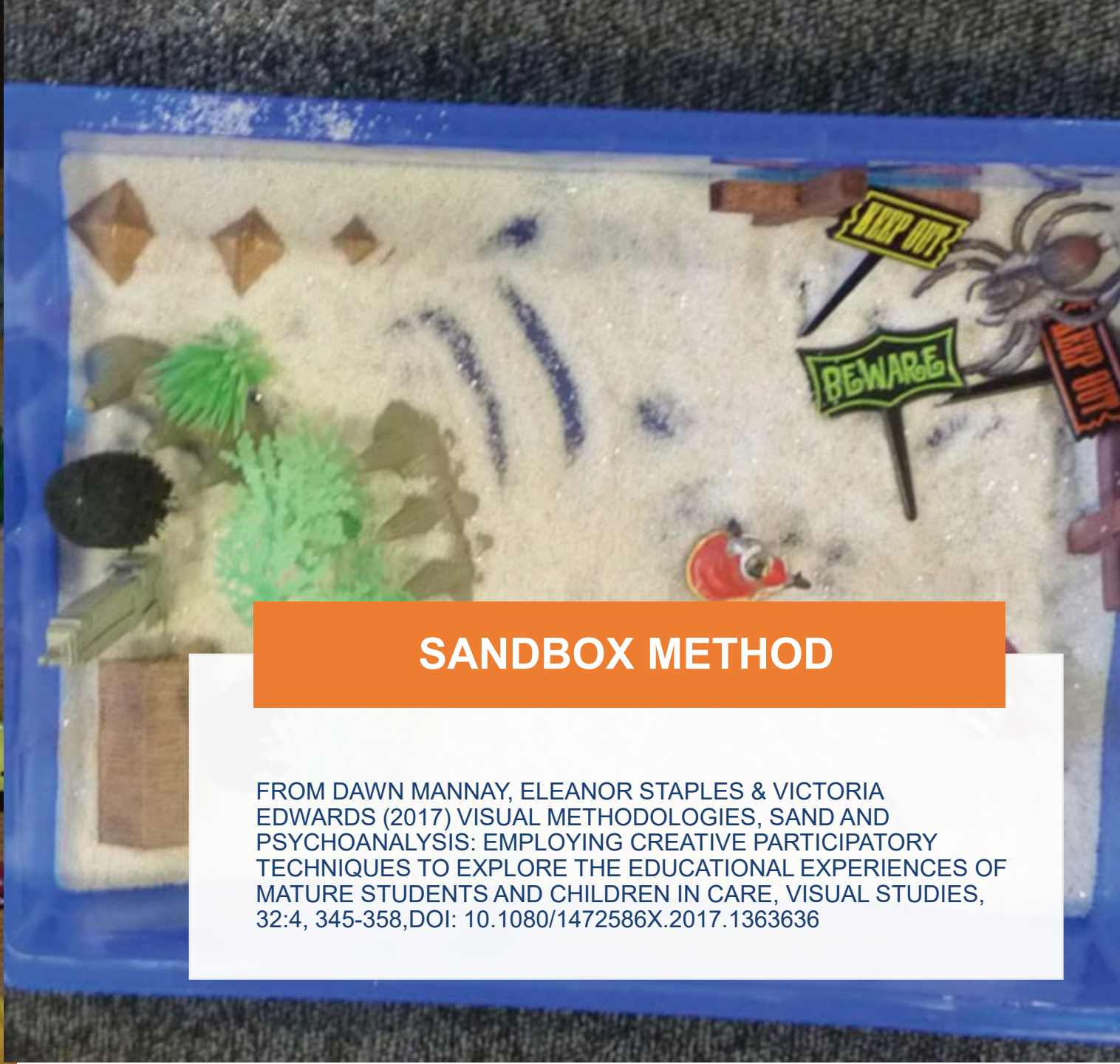


Sandboxing as a creative method: potentials and ethical challenges

Professor Debbie Watson

University of Bristol

Debbie.Watson@bristol.ac.uk



SANDBOX METHOD

FROM DAWN MANNAY, ELEANOR STAPLES & VICTORIA EDWARDS (2017) VISUAL METHODOLOGIES, SAND AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: EMPLOYING CREATIVE PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES TO EXPLORE THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MATURE STUDENTS AND CHILDREN IN CARE, VISUAL STUDIES, 32:4, 345-358, DOI: 10.1080/1472586X.2017.1363636

The World Technique of Margaret Lowenfield

Lowenfield maintained that the worlds created by children, with figures in the sand-tray, are a projective tool allowing the expression of thoughts and feelings on a symbolic level- the therapist should not attempt to interpret the symbolism of the world but rather wait for the meanings to be identified by the child, 'in recognition of the multiplicity of meanings the world may contain' (Hutton [2004](#), 607). In this manner, the figures in the sand-tray become a primary vehicle for intra-personal and interpersonal communication, where 'each figure holds unique and personal meaning for individuals' (Sangganjanavanich and Magnuson [2011](#), 266).



Difficult Conversations project

- Focus on how to help care experienced children and young people have everyday conversations about care with adopters, foster carers and social workers
- Co-producing training with CCS Adoption, CoramBAAF and Gloucester CC fostering team
- Involving stakeholders in creative workshops: adopted children, care leavers, adoptive parents, foster carers and fostering and adoption SWs



Stuck in No Man's Land

That's no man's land, that's where I am. This side is my family life, it's very hectic, it's a war zone, there's crumbling – no stability in the buildings, [...] and the grass is always greener on the other side, this was my foster placement with, you know, big house, full of love all the time but I still don't feel like I fit in anywhere. You know, all the bad side, there's nowhere for me, I just sit on my own little island in the middle [...] I came from poor upbringing with you know, abusive environment [...] and it was always very hectic and I went into a placement with this massive house with very tight family connections, you know, dinner round the table [...] and it wasn't really spoke about - about the fact that going from somewhere where you have nothing and being shown all these things that you technically could have had, it's kind of like, well, you know – [...] it's hard – I feel like it's something not really spoke about (Sarah, 20).



Who, where and how?

So, in my sandbox: over here are all, like, the people in my life, that I don't actually really like - not now but possibly when I was younger: a snake, a crab, because they like, bite and then bugs- they sting and they're just not nice creatures. So those are the people I don't really get along with. And then those are the people that I have felt that I have to do certain life story work with [...]. And then on the other side I've kind of put like a love heart and these are the people that I do really kind of want to do certain bits of work with but they're kind of blocked out, if you like, that's the fence (Ashleigh, 18).



Good and bad

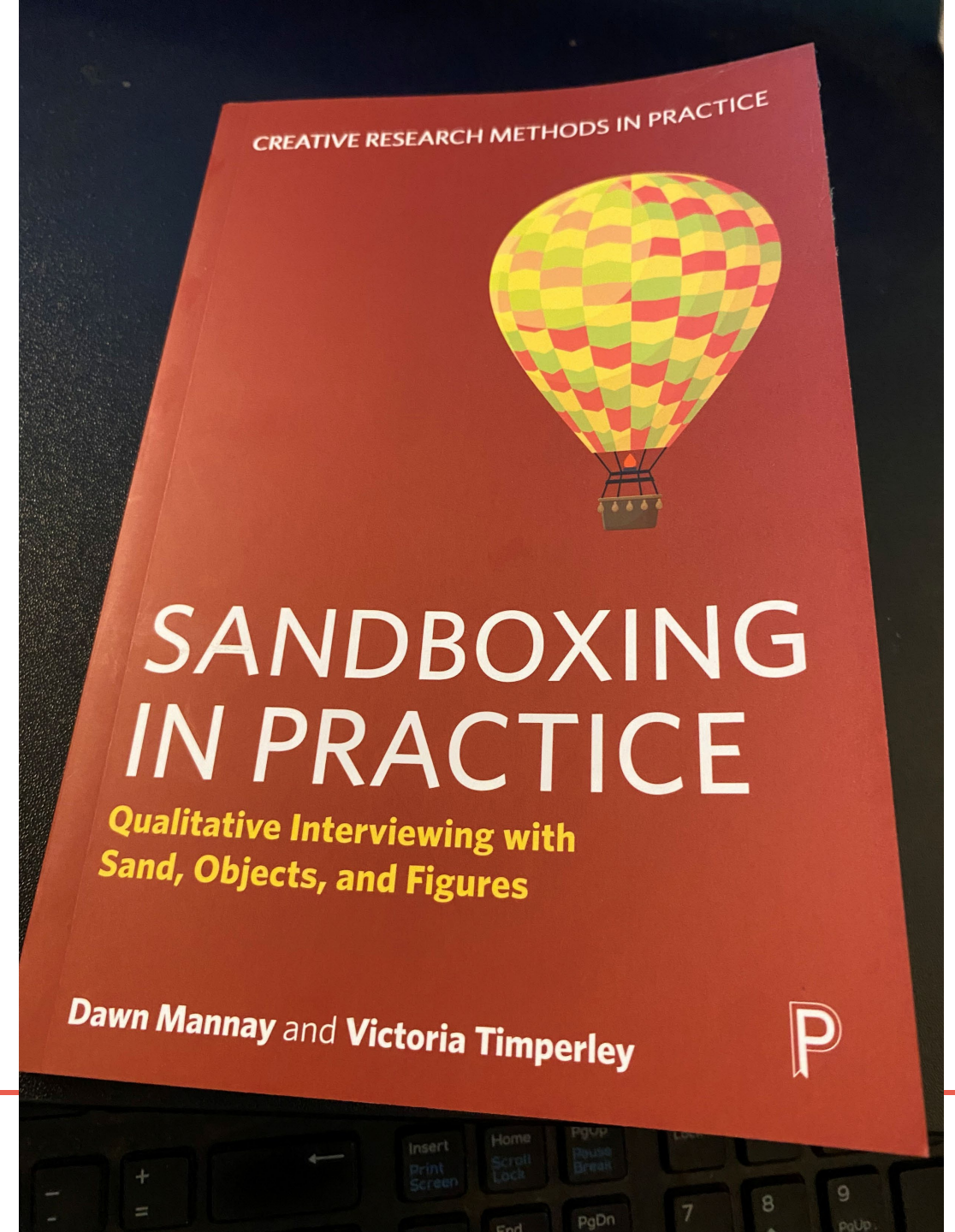
“This is the bad side, because this is what I feel like inside sometimes when I’m really angry and then sometimes this is the good side when something really good happens, like I get an award at school...but when I get a behaviour point for, like, talking or something it makes me really angry and feel like this side”

“it’s all muddy cos like it never gets groomed or anything and then all the (inaudible) that’s like gun stuff in it cos like it hardly ever works or something ‘cos no one’s there to fix it. And this is my good side because everyone’s there to fix it because it’s such a nice place...and anyone, everyone who has to help it makes it worse”



Practical challenges

- **Practical issues:** transportation and storage of boxes; adequate workshop space and privacy for individual interviews
- **Time:** need to allow enough time for participants to think about, construct and discuss their sand scenes
- **Photos:** take the photo at the beginning as people like to play with their sand while talking; might not be much left by the end of the interview!
- **Interview process:** in a workshop setting, consider number of interviewers needed to avoid participants waiting and an activity to run alongside individual interviews





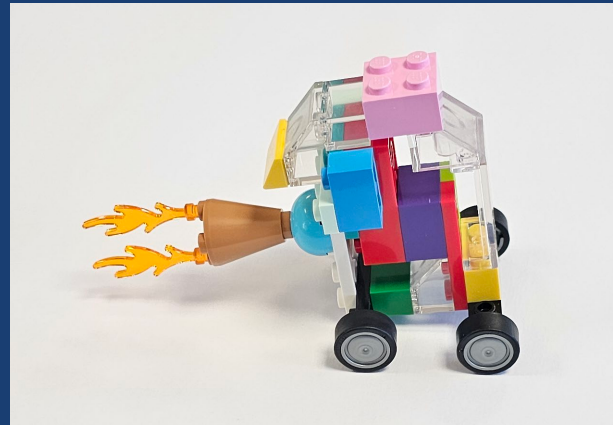
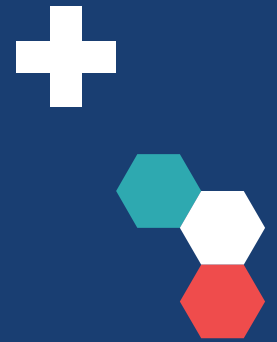
Ethical challenges

- Mirroring or assimilating a therapeutic encounter: must be considered and avoided in your activity and interview schedule
 - Mnemonic qualities of the method may engender intense emotional responses
 - Ensuing interviews may take participants and researchers on unanticipated journeys- risks of vicarious trauma
 - High emotional labour for all involved and need for support
 - Sandboxes alone should not be analysed but used for illustrative purposes in data presentation alongside narratives
-

References

- Mannay, D. & Timperley, V. (2025) *Sandboxing in Practice: qualitative interviewing with sand, objects and figures*, Policy Press.
- Staples, E., Watson, D.L. & Riches, K. (2023) Being, becoming, belonging: Negotiating temporality, memory and identity in life story conversations with care-experienced children and young people, *Qualitative Social Work*, 0(0) 1–17: DOI: 10.1177/14733250231168605.
- Watson, D.L., Staples, E., Riches, K. (2020) ‘We need to understand what’s going on because it’s our life’: Using sandboxing to understand children and young people’s everyday conversations about care. *Children and Society*, 00:1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12432>
- www.difficultconversations.info

Exploring how technology could be used to address loneliness using creative methods



Lis Grey, e.b.grey@bristol.ac.uk
ARC West and University of Bristol

This work has been supported by the LEAP Digital Health Hub, which has been funded by EPSRC under grant number EP/X031349/1

The project: Co-designing technological solutions to loneliness with at-risk populations

- Addressing loneliness is a public health priority
- Certain groups are particularly at risk
 - neurodivergent young people
 - carers of people with neurodegenerative disorders
- Interventions so far have:
 - not involved people experiencing loneliness in the design
 - treated loneliness as a simple construct
 - relied on existing technology

Objectives

1. Identify the specific unmet social needs of target groups
2. Co-design prototype devices and/or applications to address loneliness

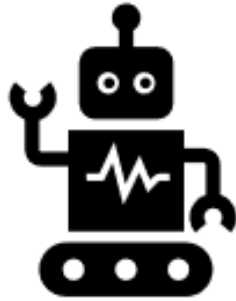
Considerations

- Loneliness is a complex and upsetting topic
- Target groups face particular communication challenges
- Need for 'blue sky thinking'



Build
understanding

What are the specific
unmet social needs of
our groups?



Explore
potential of
technology

Engage with
technologies, both
familiar and novel to
think about what's
possible



Develop
ideas

Working with an artist,
generate initial designs
for new technology



Test and
refine

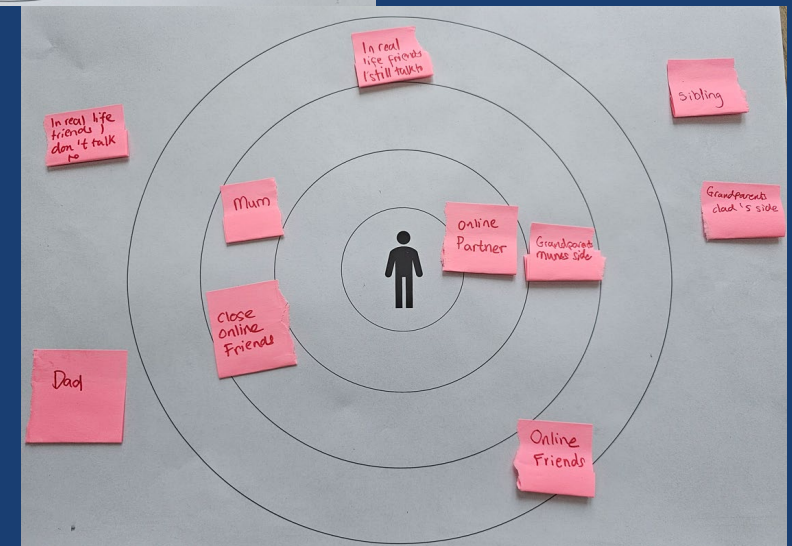
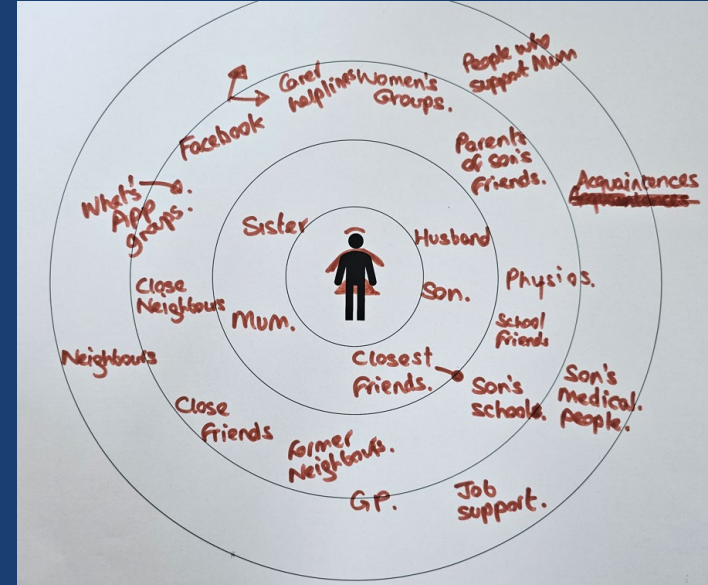
Iteratively develop and
test prototypes

Exploring loneliness

Social network mapping

Participants place people in their network on a diagram of concentric circles to indicate how close they feel to each.

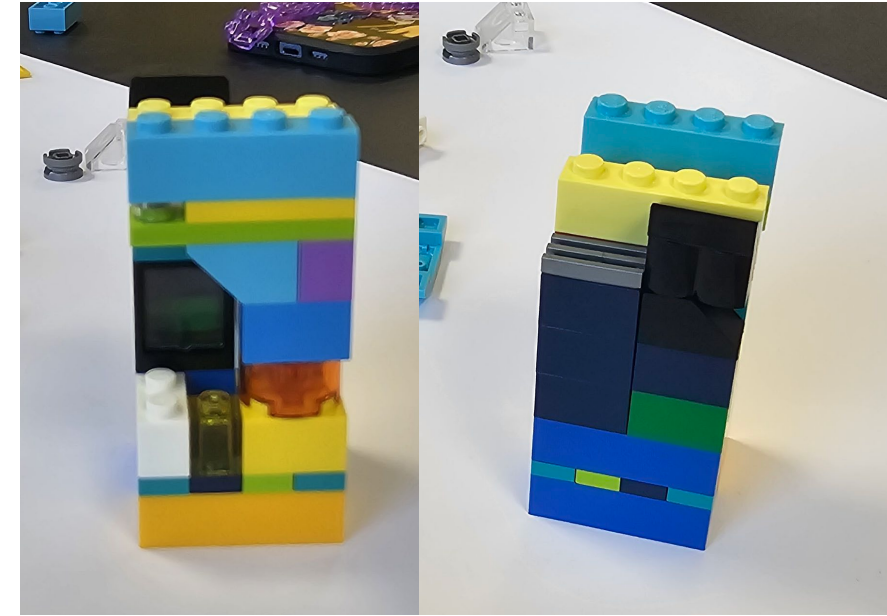
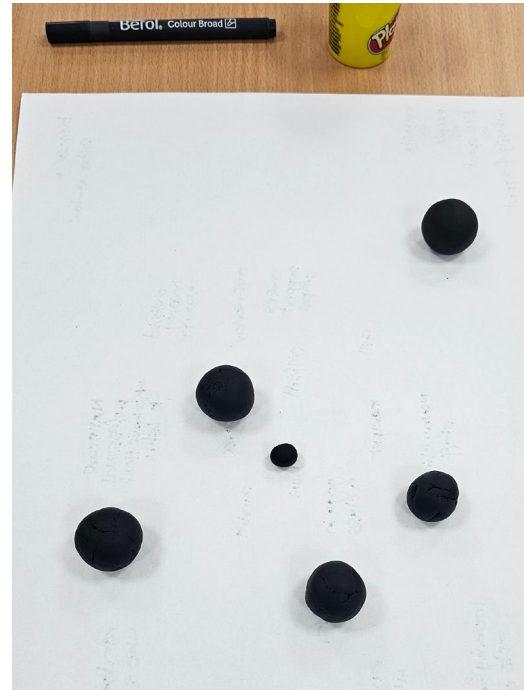
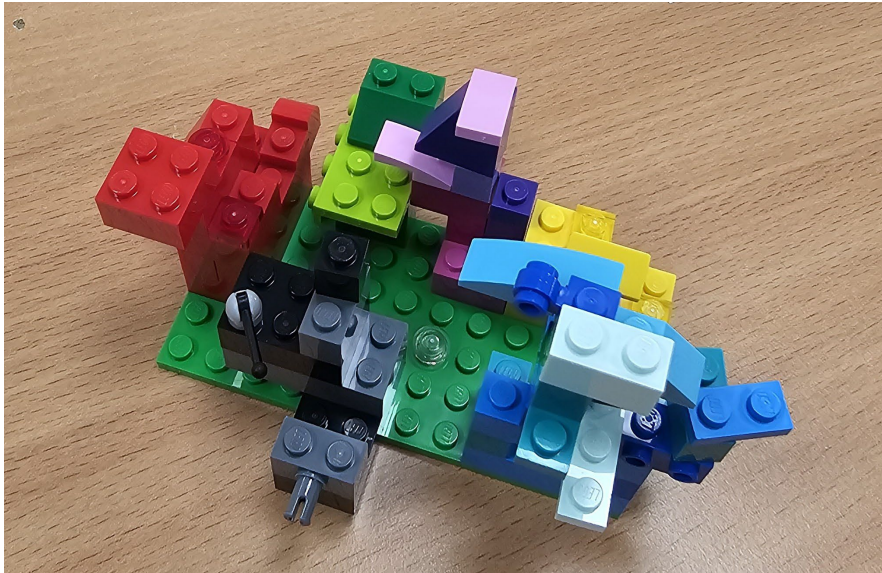
Then describe how/why they made decisions about where to place people.



Exploring loneliness

What does loneliness mean to you?

Modelling with Lego or PlayDoh

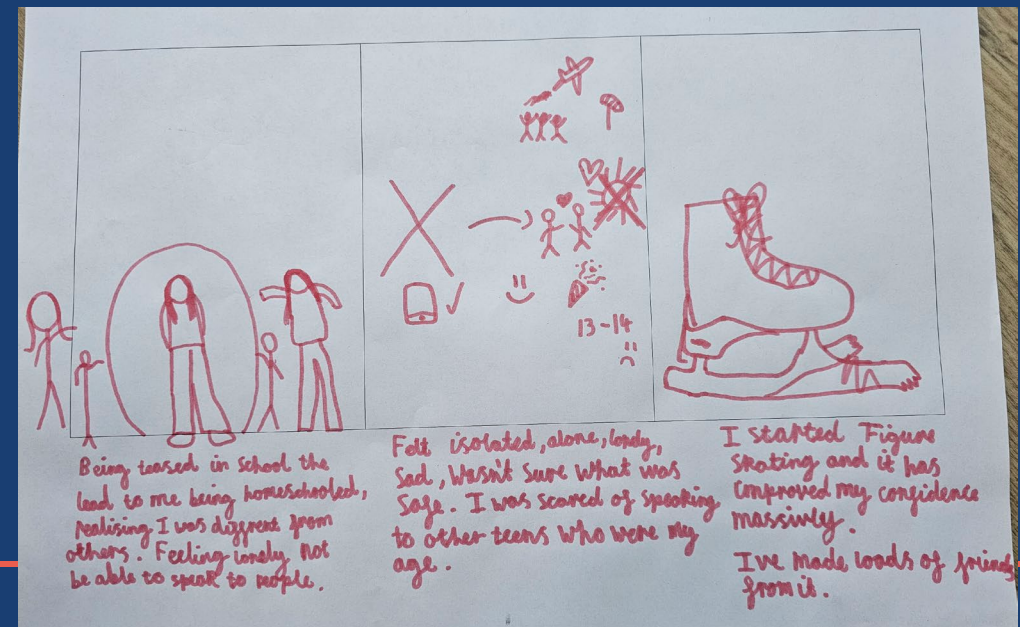
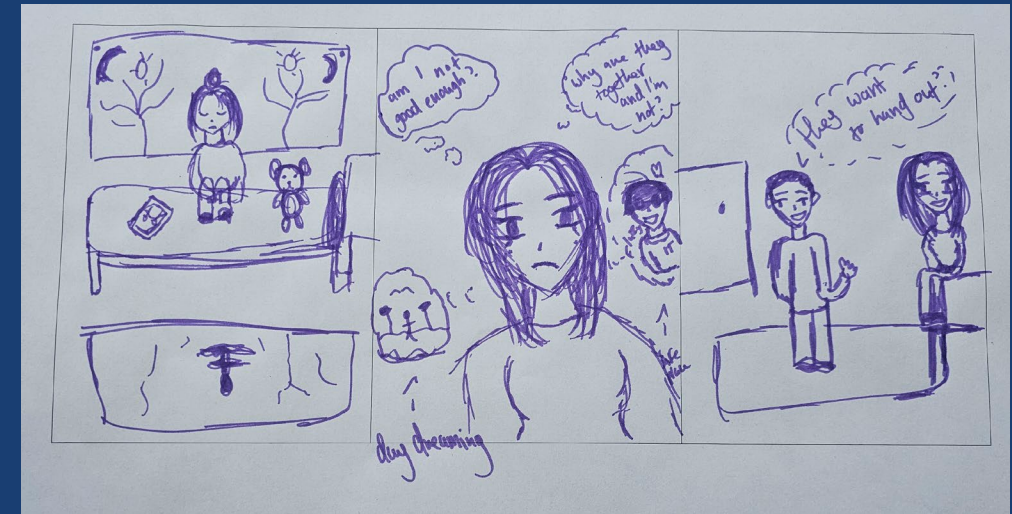


Exploring loneliness

Storyboarding

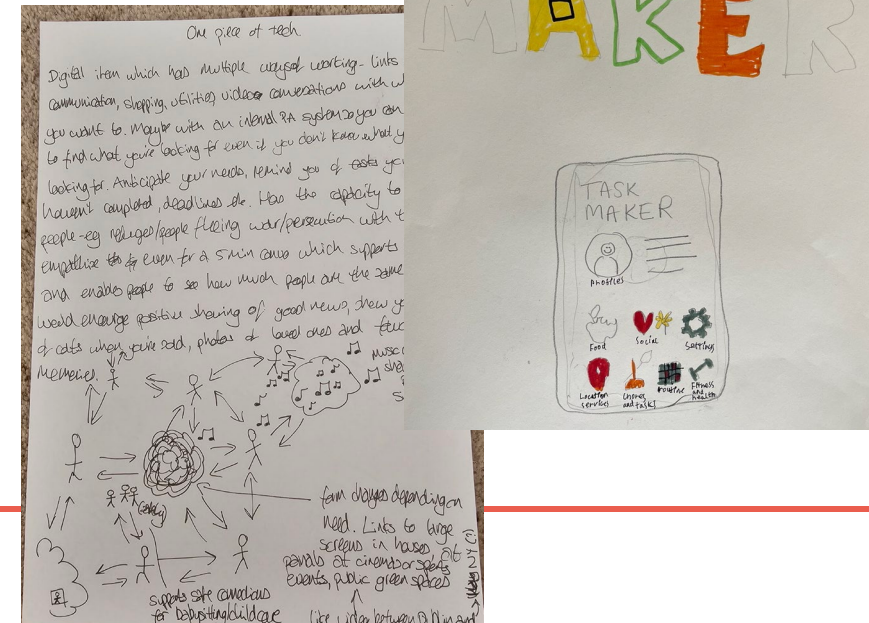
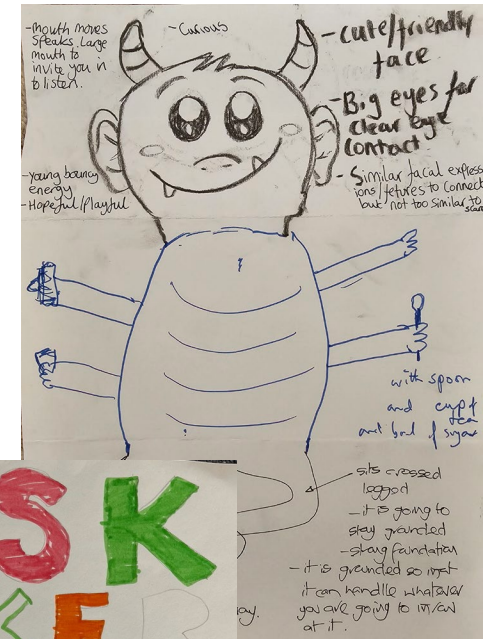
Develop a story in 3 scenes to illustrate:

- the lonely situation
- what the person is thinking/what is preventing social connection
- a solution



Artist-led workshops

1. Warm-up drawing exercises
2. Draw a creature/robot that is *great at connecting with others*
3. Good vs bad futures
4. Design your own tech – free writing and drawing
5. Collaborative design



Benefits and considerations

- FUN!
- Encourages reflective thinking
- Physical artefacts
- Does the method match your research question?
- Materials cost
- Ensure plenty of time
- Reassure - not judging artistic prowess
- This won't be everyone's cup of tea – offer alternatives
- Consent

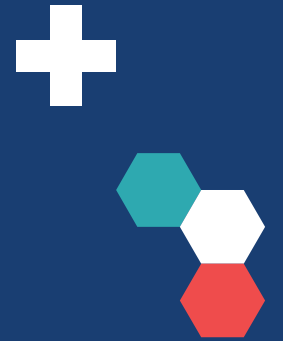


Useful resources

National Centre for Research Methods <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/>

Martin & Hanington (2012). Universal methods of design. Rockport Publishers.

International Journal of Social Research Methodology, Volume 23, Issue 1 (2020) Using creative methods to research across difference special issue.



Thank you

Collaborators on this project: Bradley Barker-Jones, Sarah Campbell, David Ellis, Patrycja Nasiadka, Emily Nielsen, Megan Pardoe, Lukasz Piwek, Ann-Marie Scott & Matt Wragg

We would like to thank all the participants involved in this research and our artist, Cai Burton - <https://joyful-design.co.uk/reportage-illustration/>

