UNDERSTANDING
SAFETY FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES
IN LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK

APRIL
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IMPACT ON URBAN HEALTH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BLACK SAFETY

A Poem by Michael Hamilton

What is this feeling
Of being around
My own in this foreign place

What is this anxiety that creeps high
Into a Sky of unsureness

To be around the group of
My sons
And daughters
And sisters
And brothers

Deep deep
In my DNA
A fear of poverty
A fear of our
De skilled
Un worked
Not fed
Those in wedded to the
Skeleton of of their own demise

How can leadership
Serve
Those
We fear?

Take a deep, deep breath
And say
Hi
(The sky is still here)!

Take a deep, deep breath
And say
Howdy do

And I find ……………

Artists
And scribes
And merchants
Boys on the way home from school
And stories
Of lived lives
And stories of spies

Who have come to take.

The trauma of
Of the mark of them
(The whites)

Is the burying
Deep deep
Within
My DNA
A
Fear
Of
My sons, my daughters, my sisters, my brothers

The trauma has grown
A fear of
ME

Hi, Howdy, How do you do?
Sawubona (Zulu). Makadie (Shona). Dumelang (Sotho).

Change begins with

Hi, Howdy, How do you do?
Sawubona(Zulu).
Makadie (Shona).
Dumelang (Sotho).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How do funders understand issues of safety for Black and racially minoritised communities? And how do these understandings of safety shape and influence the allocation of resources to communities most impacted by a lack of safety?

The Black Systemic Safety Fund was an 18-month process designed and facilitated by The Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners using a social lab approach. Core to the process was a desire to put power into the hands of Black and racially minoritised communities to define for themselves how safety might be understood and interpreted within their own localities. Furthermore, it was a process designed to understand how more community-driven interpretations of safety might shape and influence the allocation of resources to address local safety challenges using a participatory grantmaking (PGM) approach that shifted decision-making beyond understandings of safety influenced by funders and other public systems.

In this report we uncover learnings and insights from the Black Systemic Safety Fund, outlining how and why safety was selected as an area of focus for communities in Lambeth and Southwark. We highlight how local experts and community leaders came understand safety as a big, broad and complex concept - one that has to be engaged beyond the narrow lens of crime and justice to truly ensure the thriving of Black and racially minoritised communities. We then explore how an expanded understanding of safety allowed for the development of a range prototypes addressing safety within 1) the philanthropic sector, 2) the education sector, and eventually, 3) as a component of crime, justice and policing. Finally, we conclude by sharing a key insight for future work in this area: that explorations of safety within Black and racially minoritised communities must be facilitated by Black facilitators and implementing partners if we are to create the safe containers required to generate new ways of looking at stuck challenges, and ultimately to seek out new ways of allocating resources that might allow us to more effectively address safety challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

In seeking to explore what Black safety could look like, Impact on Urban Health (IoUH) initiated a process that engaged a group of community leaders in a participatory process focused on the shared challenge of (a lack of) safety for Black and racially minoritised communities in Lambeth and Southwark. [1]

The process, termed 'The Black Systemic Safety Fund' was designed and facilitated by The Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners using a social lab approach. It consisted of six workshops, with participant-led learning journeys, prototyping sessions, and reflective interviews in between. The overall process took 18 months and spanned from July 2022 to December 2023.

Core to the initiative has been an emphasis on centring Black and racially minoritised community leaders as experts in thinking about and addressing systemic challenges. The Black community leaders were compensated for their insights, expertise and engagement with the Systemic Safety Fund process, and then given a further £500K directly to collectively develop and resource a range of interconnected prototypes, solutions and initiatives aimed at tackling the systemic barriers to safety within their local communities.

This document follows on from the main Learning Report and sits alongside a series of focused outputs exploring three specific themes: 'Safety', 'Funding, Power and Participatory Grantmaking', and 'Piloting Processes for Black Led Systems Change'. In this series we highlight what was done relating to the respective focus areas, what we learned that's worth repeating and what questions can help to guide future processes.

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1. Impact on Urban Health employs a place-based approach in their work. This means they operate from their home - Lambeth and Southwark - where they invest, test and build up their understanding of how to improve health in cities. These learnings are then shared for learning on a global level.

2. CONTEXT

Impact on Urban Health was interested to learn about how the social labs process might serve as a mechanism through which to design a money-sharing and participatory grantmaking process that would strengthen the Black voluntary sector in Lambeth and Southwark. The focus on safety within this local community was chosen as a shared concern from a range of strategic focus areas already identified by Impact on Urban Health, and its partners, stakeholders and consultants. We identified several key benefits to employing a safety lens when seeking to understand urban health:

1 Historical and systemic factors: Safety concerns in Black and racially minoritised communities are rooted in a complex history of systemic racism, economic inequality, and social injustice. Learning about these factors helps individuals and communities to better comprehend the root causes of safety challenges rather than the symptoms, and to advocate for systemic change.

3 Addressing inequalities: Focusing on safety within Black and racially minoritised communities is an essential step in addressing social and racial inequalities. Safety concerns can be both a cause and a consequence of these disparities, so addressing them is a critical component of achieving social justice and equity.

2 Community empowerment: By learning about safety, Black and racially minoritised communities can become more empowered to take control of their own safety and advocate for policies and practices that prioritise the community's wellbeing. Education and awareness about safety can help foster community engagement and resilience.

4 Holistic approach to public health: Safety is a critical component of public health, and addressing safety concerns within Black and racially minoritised communities is integral to improving overall community wellbeing. This includes addressing issues such as access to healthcare, housing, education, and economic opportunities.

> **The issue of health for Black and minoritised people is multifaceted. ...It's to do with racism. And it's to do with lack of access to opportunities. It's to do with basic things like housing, you know. So it'd be naive to think that to address the issue effectively, you can ignore these other factors.**
>
> **Local Expert & Participant**

3. GUIDING METHODS AND THEORY
3.1. SOCIAL LAB METHODOLOGY

"The only way these solutions work is when they're developed in partnership with the people actually affected by these problems. "

Zaid Hassan, Author of The Social Labs Revolution

The Black Systemic Safety Fund adopted a social lab methodology. A social lab is an experimental process that brings together diverse stakeholders to tackle a complex social issue. In the lab, communities of experts explore the root causes of a selected issue, and jointly design and test prototypes and solutions to a shared challenge – both in the lab itself and beyond. As prototypes are tested in the real world, new data and insights emerge, and solutions are refined and tested further as part of a continuous cycle of improvement.

Since the majority of local community experts were themselves Black and racially minoritised, the social lab process differed somewhat from other labs run by Reos Partners, and was adapted to meet the needs of a Black led systems change initiative. For this particular process, facilitators adopted a series of participatory methods which centred on the use of music, art, play and creativity as a means of moving through 'stuck problems'. Within residential workshops, this involved working alongside Drew Sinclair, a multidisciplinary artist and creator with a specialism in community work.

"What we've done in this Lab is quite unique and different from other multi stakeholder processes. Often, the idea is that we work with a microcosm of the system in the room. This often means that a few minoritised voices are part of these processes. In reality, this means you often see dominant power structures still showing up in those rooms (i.e. minoritised voices not being heard, leaving the process due to a lack of a sense of belonging). I think what we've really done differently here is that we actually moved marginalised voices from margin to centre by working with a predominantly Black and Brown group of people. One of the underlying hypotheses, for me, that we're testing is something along the lines of: people who are oppressed by a system often know best how they actually work, therefore we need to centre those voices in our efforts to achieve real, systemic change. "

Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners

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2. As ilse Marschalek et al (2022) note, this process means social labs function according to a participatory action research methodology, providing a continuous feedback and improvement loop.

3.2. OUR UNDERLYING FRAMEWORK

" **Instead of the normal, straightforward way of dealing with complex issues, the U methodology allowed in-depth analysis of complex issues, and provided a holding space for participants to think deeply, reflect and develop solutions to safety issues. "**

Local Expert & Participant

The participatory methods and facilitation approaches employed throughout the process were guided by Theory U, an action-research and awareness-based method for changing systems and addressing complex social issues pioneered by Otto Scharmer. The U-theory was applied to 'The Black Systemic Safety Fund' using a three-phased approach which involved systematically addressing and responding to: (1) The Internal Conditions of the Intervenor, (2) A Shared Concern with Safety and (3) Actions to be Taken.

1. The Internal Conditions of the Intervenor:

Rather than jumping immediately into problem-solving mode, the intervenor(s) in a system - in this case, the group of participants in the Black safety process - must become more aware of themselves. Consequently, group members focus on building awareness of their strengths, limitations, areas in which they feel stuck, and what motivates them to become unstuck and move forward.
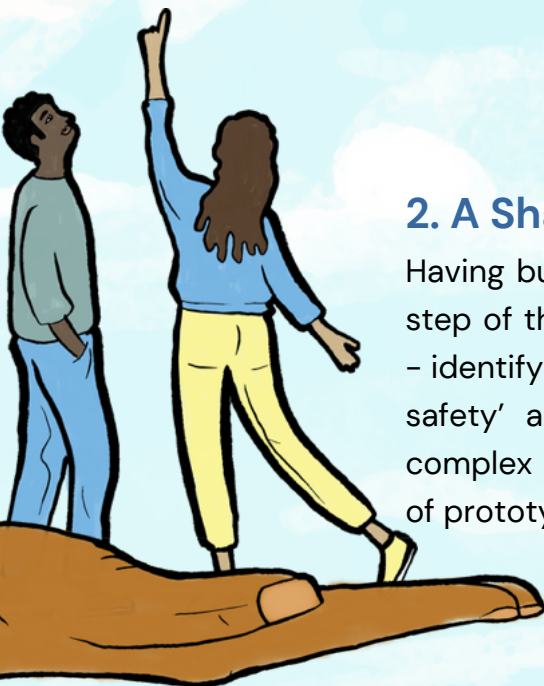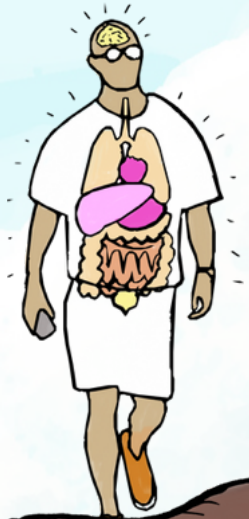
2. A Shared Concern with Safety:

Having built individual and collective awareness, the second step of the U-process emphasises becoming subject driven - identifying and collectively working to understand 'a lack of safety' as the shared social problem or issue, which is complex in nature, and therefore required the development of prototypes for action.
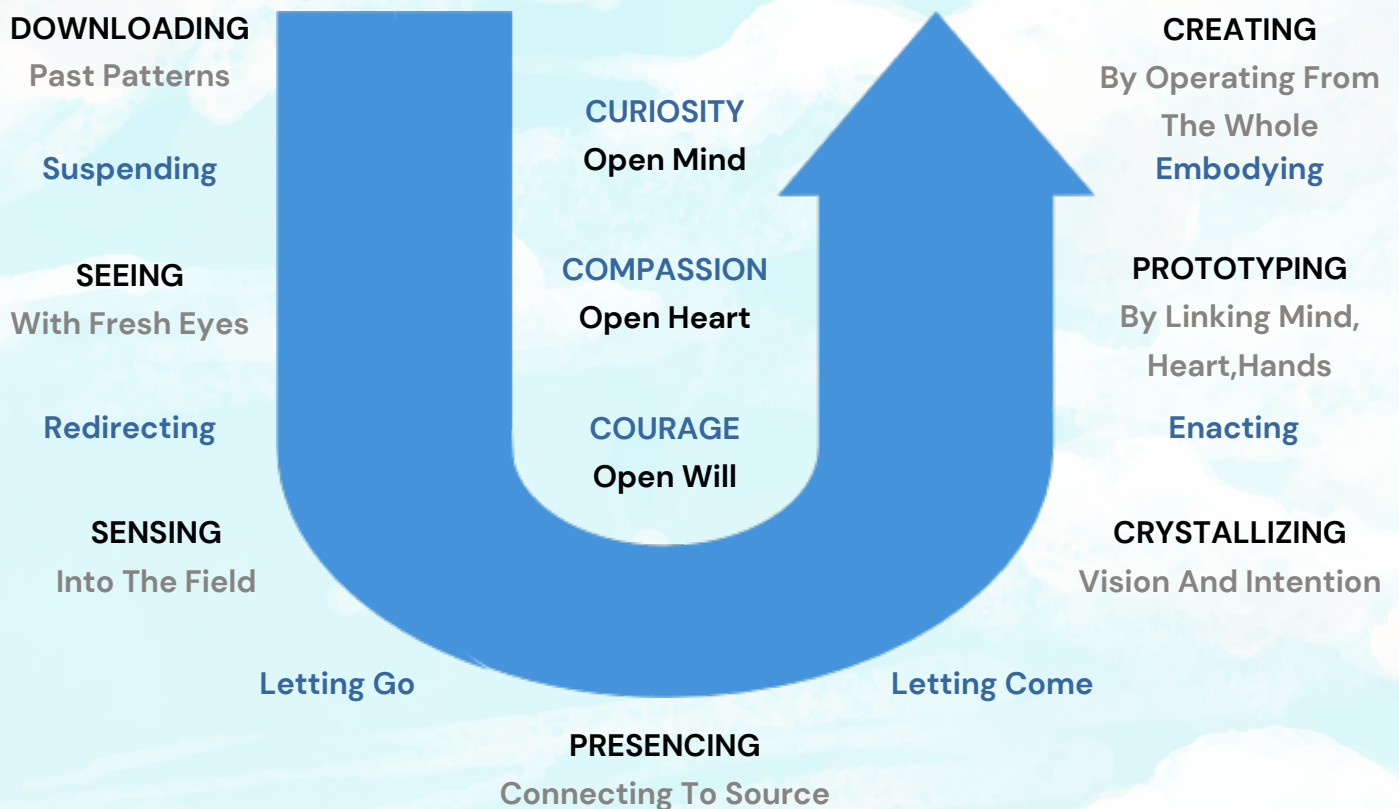
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3. Otto Scharmer (2018) The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications. Available at: https://www.u-school.org/theory-u

3. Actions to be Taken:

Finally, in the third step of the U-process, participants move into taking action to address their shared challenge using the prototypes developed in earlier phases. In this phase, community experts intentionally try not to overthink the problem or their actions, focussing first on implementing solutions, and refining their approach as they move forward and new insights emerge.

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DOWNLOADING
Past Patterns

Suspending

SEEING
With Fresh Eyes

Redirecting

SENSING
Into The Field

CURIOSITY
Open Mind

COMPASSION
Open Heart

COURAGE
Open Will

CREATING
By Operating From The Whole
Embodying

PROTOTYPING
By Linking Mind, Heart,Hands

Enacting

CRYSTALLIZING
Vision And Intention

Letting Go

Letting Come

PRESENCING
Connecting To Source

3.3 ANALYSIS APPROACH

Together, the learning partnership team took an ethnographic approach to learning work. This involved participating in and observing group processes and workshops, gathering a range of additional data, and reflecting collectively on emerging insights throughout the project. These insights were used to inform, refine, and make improvements to the work of the implementing partners - Impact on Urban Health, the Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners - over the duration of the process. The analysis took place over three key phases:

Phase 1:
Initial and in-depth analysis of interview transcripts to identify core and sub-themes and learning

Phase 2:
Critical reflection on core and sub-themes to explore issues of power and coloniality – e.g. identifying silences, the unsaid, and other elephants or sticky issues to be surfaced

Phase 3:
Sharing and facilitating a discussion of all learning and analysis with participants at the project's final workshop in order to sense-check and identify points of resonance and dissonance amongst participants

The interviews conducted with 15 participants (60%) served as the largest source of data for this report. Apart from one interviewee, the majority that shared their perspectives at interview were involved from the beginning to the end of the process, and were generally more engaged in participant-led initiatives such as learning journeys and prototyping activities.

As such, the insights shared through interviews skew towards especially enthusiastic and committed participants. Less represented are the views of those who were unable or unwilling, for a range of reasons, to remain involved and engaged with the process.

4. PROCESS REFLECTIONS

"Before I thought of safety as crime, law and order. As a result of the process I now think of safety as the ability to thrive... being able to navigate a particular aspect of life well. Whether that's in education, within your organisation, or as an individual. I see safety as an overarching theme; we have to think of our safety in order to truly thrive."

Local Expert & Participant

Tackling the subject of safety was no simple task. Right from the outset, it became clear that safety is a big and complex concept, open to different interpretations across the wide range of contexts in which local community experts and participants worked. Participants in the process described how they revisited the idea of safety consistently in the second phase of the U-process, as they worked towards a shared understanding of the concept.

4.1. NAVIGATING SCOPE AND COMPLEXITY

"At the end of the day, the world is not a safe place out there for many of us. So anything that we do to create more justice, more equity, will lead to more safety in a sense."

Local Expert & Participant

For some participants, the process of revisiting and collectively exploring safety was in itself challenging. Since safety was such a big and complex idea, it became hard to grapple with. Holding onto a clear definition of safety seemed to become more and more challenging as the process progressed and participants were challenged to think about the topic in new ways.[4]

Additionally, since Impact on Urban Health as the funder had established safety as the core theme and focus of the process, some participants had concerns around whether the approach to safety was intended to be prescriptive, constrained or limited in some way.

In earlier and middle stages of the process, participants questioned whether they were expected to think about safety more narrowly - considering fiscal, bodily or psychological safety and wellbeing in line with the funder's imagined interests, for example - or whether they could trust that the funder was truly process-oriented and open to wider-ranging reflections, solutions and prototypes from the community.

In short, especially in earlier stages of the process, working through these questions required that participants and implementing partners alike take risks with each other. This involved learning to let go, trust the process, suspend judgement, and sit in the uncertainty of these questions as they collectively explored what safety meant to them.

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4. In many ways, this exploration of safety as a big and complex idea - an emergent property of the system - was typical of the kinds of insights surfaced through systems change processes as indicated in Valente's (2017) article on 'Complexity Theories and Systems Thinking: Parallels and Differences.

4.2. FRESH THINKING AND EXPANDED FOCUS

"The truth of the matter is that some people suffer disadvantages because of their race in the system, because of their gender, and things like that. So if you want to help improve safety outcomes, you need to understand that the factors that will have to be addressed may have to be wider than a narrow health person's definition of what safety should be "

Local Expert & Participant

By the end of the project, most participants agreed that exploring safety so openly had been a critical aspect of the process. Not only did it allow for fresh thinking around a complex issue, but also a more expanded focus on safety in ways that helped restore agency to local communities.

Critically, in the safety exploration, this meant local experts from Black and racially minoritised communities held and shared the power to know and interpret for themselves what safety means within Lambeth and Southwark.

" It would be naive for a funder to think that to effectively address an important single issue of safety, you can do that without taking on board the other causal factors which lead to the problem manifesting as we see it today. …To be effective, you need to know how to deal with safety holistically within the limits of your resourcing. "

Local Expert & Participant

4.3. A COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF SAFETY

"We are all minorities… who are the most vulnerable. I have a sense of belonging and safety in this group despite being different from other members. So If you ask me, what does safety mean, then I'm going to tell you, it's trust. I believe we feel safe when we feel included. "

Local Expert & Participant

The end result of the exploration, was that participants generated a shared understanding of safety as a broad and multifaceted concept including, but not limited to:

BODILY SAFETY AND AUTONOMY

PSYCHOLOGICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL SAFETY

THE ABILITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY

FREEDOM TO LIVE YOUR LIFE

A FEELING OF BELONGING

A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO OTHERS; COLLECTIVE/COMMUNITY POWER HELD TOGETHER BY A SHARED CONCERN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

ACCESS TO ASSETS, RESOURCES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING GENERATIONAL WEALTH (I.E. A REAL CAPACITY AND/OR PATHWAY TO LIVING 'BEYOND SURVIVAL MODE')

THE ABILITY TO THRIVE ACROSS A WHOLE RANGE OF ARENAS, SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS (E.G. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH ETC.)

THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE AND EXERCISE AGENCY WITHIN SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS (E.G. THROUGH INITIATIVES LIKE OPERATION BLACK VOTE)

THE CAPACITY TO LIVE FREE FROM FEAR OR COERCION (I.E. RELIGIOUS, INTERPERSONAL, OR INSTITUTIONAL)

Conversely, a lack of safety was typically expressed as the absence of these things. Within systems and institutional settings, non-safety was thus associated with:

NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POLICE AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

EXCLUSION FROM EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING; MARGINALISATION WITHIN EXISTING EDUCATION SERVICES

LACK OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE TO ENSURE SAFETY (E.G. POOR LIGHTING WHEN PEOPLE GO FOR WALKS IN LOCAL ESTATES)

COERCIVE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OR AN OVER RELIANCE ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY TO SOLVE OR BYPASS PROBLEMS (I.E. 'GO AND PRAY' GUIDANCE FOR ALL ISSUES)

A LACK OF COMMUNITY ASSETS (E.G. BUILDINGS OR SPACES FOR THE COMMUNITY), RESOURCES AND VIABLE PATHWAYS TO BUILDING GENERATIONAL WEALTH.

APATHETIC AND SELFISH/INDIVIDUALISED RESPONSES TO SHARED CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY (I.E. 'EVERY MAN FOR THEMSELVES' APPROACH)

A LACK OF COMMUNITY POWER AND UNITY IN THE FACT OF CHALLENGES (E.G. 'OPERATION BLACK VOTE WAS SET UP TO BRING US TOGETHER OVER POLICY BUT THERE ISN'T REALLY ANYTHING ELSE').

A LACK OF ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION WITHIN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS WRIT LARGE

TOP
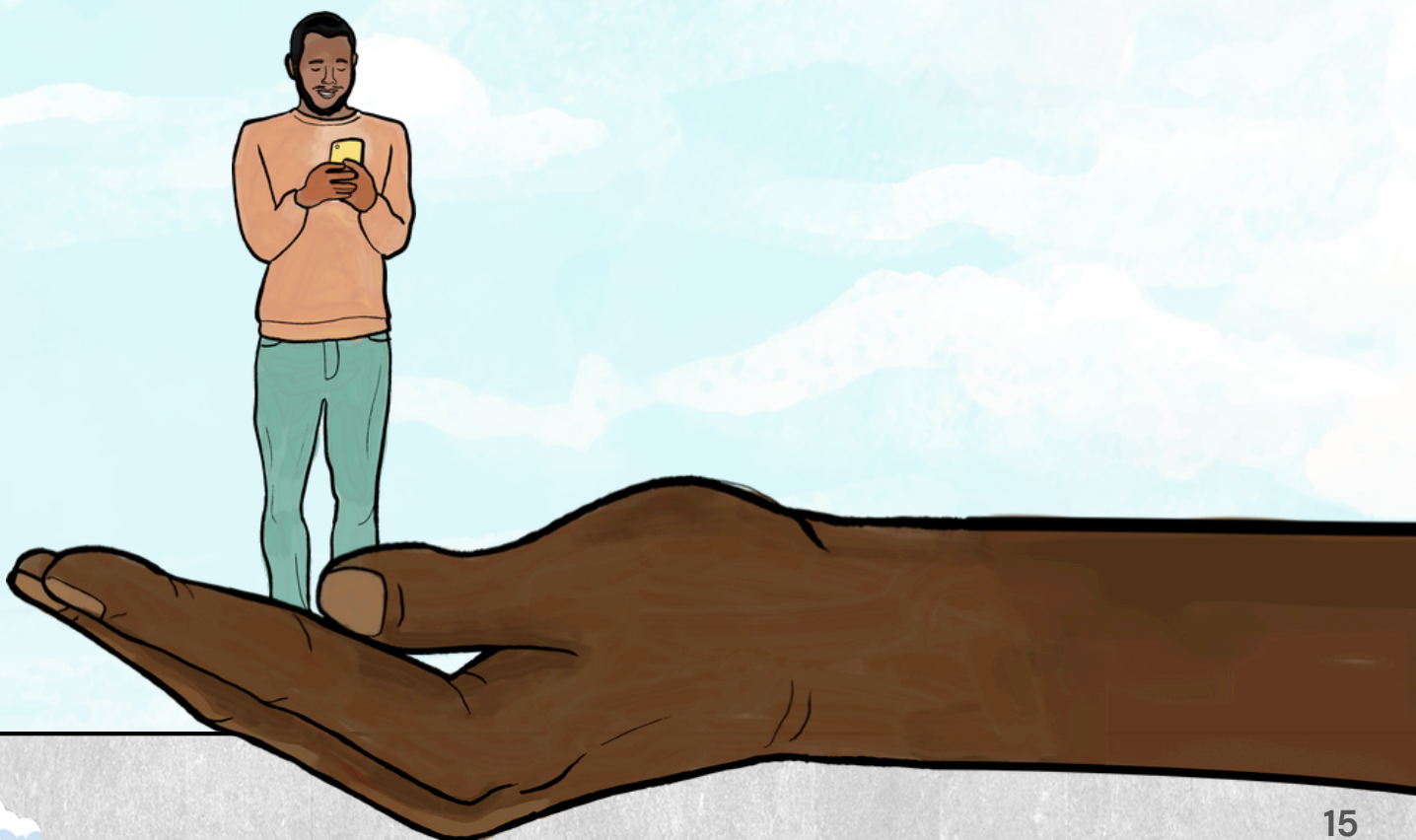
4.4. A REFLECTION ON SAFETY BY MICHAEL HAMILTON

I'm so glad this is a blog, and not a paper or an essay. If it were an essay or a paper, I would be forced to find the 'real truth' by citing the truths of others. I would have to have citations, and from those citations, create meaning from the truths of others. As a blog, I instead have permission to share my own truths, and have my truths accepted as mine and valid (or perhaps simply valued!) just because they belong to me.

The Safety Social Lab comprised 17 Black activists working in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. Over eighteen months, they came together in a series of full-day workshops and weekend residential sessions to explore what safety meant to them, and to the communities they work with.

The 'U process' was the backbone – the tool used to bring the group to a place where they could act. The process has three phases. Firstly, to know and be aware of the truths they/we arrived with. Secondly, to understand, learn from, and hear the truths of other experts who are not in the group. Thirdly, to act from the position that their collective truths are 'real'; and to act from a sense of legitimacy that what they believe can help determine the most valuable action to take in addressing challenges they know, live and understand.

The U process intentionally views 'truth' as problematic. It accepts the validity of all participants' truths and attempts to increase their value by allowing participants to submit their truth to both internal and external challenges.

During the Safety Social Lab, the truths of how we might 'make the Black community in London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark safer' was the question held loosely as we worked. The exploration led us to many other questions: What is it to be safe? What do we need to be safe from? What are the benefits of feeling safe? Who is the Black community?

Facilitating the Black community
Racism is a dirty, sticky tool. It impacts and leaves its mark on all that it touches.

As a Black facilitator holding space for members of the Black community, I have come to a series of underpinning values or principles that I apply as 'essential conditions' when working with groups.

These essential conditions enable enough safety in the group for participants to bring their truths to the table. They are an attempt to intentionally clean the impact of racism from participants, enabling them to move away from narratives of us created by others (i.e. the 'truths' of others), so that we may move towards our own self-defined truth.

The conditions include:

Believe what Black participants speak.

As a facilitator, I believe what you say is your honestly held belief at this time and an honest description of your circumstances.

I am on your side.

As a facilitator, I accept that, in terms of racism, there are sides. And I am on yours.

There is an experience of being human beyond what we know just from our five senses.

As a facilitator, I support your quest to make sense of this.

Transparent in taking risks to meet your needs.

As a facilitator, I will openly oppose those who oppress you. I recognise that this will involve taking risks, and I will take these risks openly.

Transparent in my own power struggle

As a Black facilitator, I am involved in struggles for my own leadership. I will be open in that struggle.

Identity

As a facilitator, I will recognise that you have the right to be all that you are. I will support your journey to be whomever you need to be. My role is to tell you to label less, not label more.

Confess to being round.

As a facilitator, I will not attempt to flatten the world. I will show different sides of myself.

Share my contribution.

As a facilitator, I will share my contribution to the struggle against racism and oppression. I encourage you to question and challenge my contribution.

Touching Africa

As a facilitator, I will encourage and create opportunities for you to touch Africa however you can.

So often, as Black people, our truth is spoken on our behalf. What is important, who is important, the issues of importance, the moments of importance, are narrated by others operating according to their own interests.

The stickiness of racism means that, as Black people, we must be continually checking; cleaning ourselves of narratives about us which are not ours and don't serve us. We must be purposeful in filtering reality.

Believing what we speak and being on participants' side allows unfiltered versions of their truths to be shared, and checked with healthy challenge. When the facilitator shares their own fragility—shares their roundness and accepts challenge—it models a truth of the struggle to challenge racism and oppression: that the struggle is stronger and more effective as we accept each other's challenge.

Knowing, valuing, and loving the root from which we came emboldens us with new strengths and gives us a solid platform of success from which to speak. Freedom is knowing myself, having a strong sense of me beyond the labels that are affixed to me, and using that strong sense of self as a space from which to act.

Adjacent possibilities

Complexity theory has a notion of 'adjacent possibilities'. These are the things which could happen from the space that we are currently in. Throughout the safety social lab we explored the adjacent possibilities for safety among Black communities in Lambeth and Southwark. The end of the lab process calls for action. The participants had to decide from their truths which of the possibilities they should collectively act on. They decided on three:

Education

Participants want to create a kite mark for schools. Ensuring that schools have mechanisms for the removal of racism from their institutions and from their people. Making schools a safer place for black children

Funding

Equitable funding for Black organizations means more than giving us the same amount (though this would be a good start). It means creating safety for Black-led organisations by enabling our narrative to be at the centre of the priorities for funding. It means funding in a way that encourages longevity for our organisations.

Supporting the physical infrastructure and leadership

No community can be safe when it relies on others to provide for its needs. This action enables safety by working toward the Black community having legal ownership of spaces, and developing the leadership to operate and hold those spaces ourselves.

Since the end of the lab I have had conversations with others about the choices for action made by the group. I simply say that the group looked at who they were, listened to each other, met with others, explored the possibilities for action, and decided that these were their priorities. They decided collectively that these actions were based on a narrative of themselves, constructed by and for themselves.

Which are the truths that inform your choice?

What informs your narrative of us?

5. EXPERIMENTING AND PROTOTYPING

As part of the creative and experimental social lab process participants were required to create and then test different prototypes in order to address the complex issue of safety. Given the multifaceted dimensions of safety generated by the group, process participants noted that most, if not all, Black-led organisations within Lambeth and Southwark were in some way already working to ensure the safety of Black and racially minoritised groups locally.

However, a key challenge for most remains that many local organisations are themselves placed in consistently unsafe situations through their reliance on inadequate, inconsistent and unpredictable funding. Exacerbating this scenario further has been the reality that even when these local organisations have been able to secure consistent funding, it has typically been project-focussed work and initiatives rather than core operational costs or funds which build their capacity and sustainability.

Armed with this insight, process participants came up with a range of ideas to address issues of safety within the social lab. Among these, three key prototypes have been developed and taken forward, each of which is currently being implemented and tested by local community experts and process participants.

5.1. PROTOTYPES

The first two of these prototypes – 'Wakanda Assets' and 'Reimagining Funding' – have emphasised addressing the precarity, instability and lack of predictability experienced by local organisations in relation to funds. Both have thus focused on securing the safety of Black and racially minoritised communities, by developing the capacity and sustainability of local grassroots and community organisations already working to address safety – i.e. working on what groups have determined to be the root causes of a lack of safety.

A third prototype, 'The Black Ofsted', focuses on addressing racial inequality within local education systems, securing the safety of younger Black and racially minoritised students in Lambeth and Southwark.

A fourth prototype around 'Crime, Justice & Policing' has also been proposed, and participants have reserved a portion of funding to do further thinking around how they might collectively tackle what they acknowledge to be a very important safety issue for Black and racially minoritised communities in Lambeth and Southwark.

This decision to pool funding to return to a focus on crime, justice and policing at the end of the process (i.e. in the final residential and beyond) has been an important insight in itself – Black community leaders have valued the opportunity to consider safety beyond a narrow lens inflected by whiteness and white systems, but also recognise the importance and urgency of tackling issues in this arena on their own terms having had the space to be unburdened by this expectation.

5.2. PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM CANDICE JAMES

Getting involved with the safety group sparked a journey of self-awareness, self-reflection, and personal discovery. Guided by the U-Process, I embarked on a process with several other local Community Leaders and ended up rethinking and shifting my own relationship with safety along the way.

Three of the most important important insights I'm taking from the process include:

Take the risk of accepting 'the invitation'

Before the safety process I had made a deliberate decision to reduce my involvement in partnership forums. I had come to find partnership forums a drain on my energy and time, feeling that most of the partnership opportunities I was involved with did not generate a significant return on investment for my organisation.

An invitation to join the safety group project from Ubele in March 2022 changed things. I was intrigued by Ubele and their approach to supporting Black and minority groups. So, motivated by this curiosity, I chose to participate, bringing along my big laughs, giggles, and genuine joy.

Taking this risk allowed me to work through the heavy weight of cynicism, which I also brought into the room from past experiences of being part of what I call 'the partnership parade'! Fortunately for me, the risk paid off; this time around, there was a distinct difference in what I had encountered through past partnership endeavours.

Sometimes we need to shift our own mental modes

After 15 years of leading a small community organisation, taking part in the safety process allowed me to challenge some long-standing mental modes. Over the years, I've established a safe haven within my organisation—a haven that mirrors the refuge I needed as a child.

Participation in the Safety Group allowed me to understand what I've built as the Director of Loughborough Community Centre, and the "why" behind what I do - a why that is rooted in a firm stance against injustice.

Through "the yam" activity I participated in early on in the process, I came to understand how much of work as a practitioner has been driven by fear, cynicism, and a defensive mindset focused on protecting and defending myself, and by extension, other young people in the past. Reflecting on my operating style and recognising its' limitations was essential to my personal growth.

It allowed me to make a commitment to remain present and open-minded about the process, and I'm pleased to say that I stayed true to that commitment. Not only did this ensure I brought the best of myself to the group throughout the process; but also truly transformed my mindset for the better by allowing me to be more outward looking.

As a result, I embraced an important opportunity to travel to Kenya with some of my peers from the safety process. This gave me the life-changing opportunity to attend and actively contribute to the Global African Diaspora Forum, which you can read about as part of my blog here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bKZ_uCJjlz8dz-VBS_vVcSB8jro-KMOG/view?usp=sharing

My mind has expanded by turning my attention outwards

Being open to the experience of travelling to Kenya was transformative on more levels than I could have imagined. The opportunity to meet new people and networks was in itself powerful. But moving beyond my usual environment also came with huge learnings too.

Kenya was my first visit to Africa, and I had never travelled alone without a companion before. Connecting with new colleagues over breakfast while abroad reminded me that I do need human connection. This broke me out of my pattern of avoiding interactions and pushed me to engage with unfamiliar others. In the end, I found great joy in cultivating relationships - both in Kenya, and back home with community partners once I had rediscovered what was possible through the safety process.

Challenging my sense of fear and vulnerability.

But getting there was not an easy task: I'm a working mum, accustomed to living within a safe, well-structured and repetitive routine. I've come to realise that spontaneity and unpredictability challenge my inner sense of safety. I prefer knowing my schedule and sticking to it. However, my involvement in the Safety Group has pushed me far beyond my comfort zone, and I now appreciate this experience as it has taught me the value of flexibility and adaptation, with my trip to Kenya offering me the greatest test and lesson in being open and responsive. As I reflected in my blog about my experiences of travelling to Kenya:

I wanted adventure, but I'm now unsure what adventure means. ...this experience made me feel unsafe and vulnerable... In the moment my feelings were intense and could have led to behaviour that would have further compromised the safety of the group and myself. The shared sense of vulnerability amongst the group and the driver, I felt a deeper sense of connection to all in the group, and this increased my sense of trust and supported the forming of our relationship, which was positive.

I've taken the time to consider the roots of my fear and have realised that controlling and containing myself as a community leader has provided a false sense of security. This approach has led me to operate in isolation within my practice. However, the Safety Group has encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and connect with others. Within this supportive space, I've found that I simply had to present my whole self without worrying about being or bringing more than I have to offer. I've come to recognise that I often project unnecessary worry and doubt. Now, I'm mindful of this tendency. I've learned that my authentic self, in its entirety, is enough, and the process has validated this realisation and allowed me to let go a little.

Establishing a shared sense of purpose and assets is empowering.

Sharing a space with nuanced perspectives felt empowering. The activities facilitated within the Safety Group allowed me to appreciate differences in a way that I hadn't previously considered. The phrase "in addition to..." became particularly meaningful as it highlighted the richness of diverse viewpoints and experiences.

This process validated and expanded our exploration and discoveries. It became evident that the group was multifaceted, and no single contribution overshadowed another. This realisation provided a greater sense of validation for all of us. As we explored and discovered together, a shared sense of purpose emerged. Discovering the community work taking place in Kenya extended my exploration beyond our local community of Lambeth and Southwark, allowing me to forge connections to the shared experiences of people in Africa and the Diaspora.

" There are many issues faced by the African diaspora and there are multiple ways that people are finding solutions to problems. Thinking beyond the conference, my takeaway is deeper consideration on: how do we create a shared space globally to explore improved ways of working together, which invests our collective assets and capital for social good? How can we ensure continuous dialogue and the sharing of novel practice? "

Participating in the "Wakanda Owned Assets" group has directed my focus towards community assets—what we currently possess, where there are gaps, and how we can attain and sustain these assets for the betterment of our community. Reflecting on my experiences from the trip and my time with the Safety Group, I've come to understand the pressing need for re-learning in a manner that fosters personal and collective accountability. This is essential for repairing, reclaiming, and reframing the structures within which our communities operate.

In my journey of re-learning, I've come to realise that the task ahead is not as daunting as I initially believed. It's not an impossible feat. My learning journeys have introduced me to a multitude of positive initiatives and remarkable individuals leading change endeavours.

To Conclude…

As I continue on this path, I'm holding onto the question:

"How do we continue to facilitate the exploration of safety mechanisms to maximise the experience of life and the ability to thrive for Black people?"

This ending of the Safety Group marks a new beginning. I feel like I'm embracing a new way of being; a sense of rejuvenation within me. I firmly believe that we've made a positive nudge towards enhancing safety within our community as a collective movement. And as Bob Marley reminded us, that journey starts from within:

**" Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery.
None but ourselves can free our minds. "
Bob Marley**

Candice James is the Director of Loughborough Community Centre (LCC)
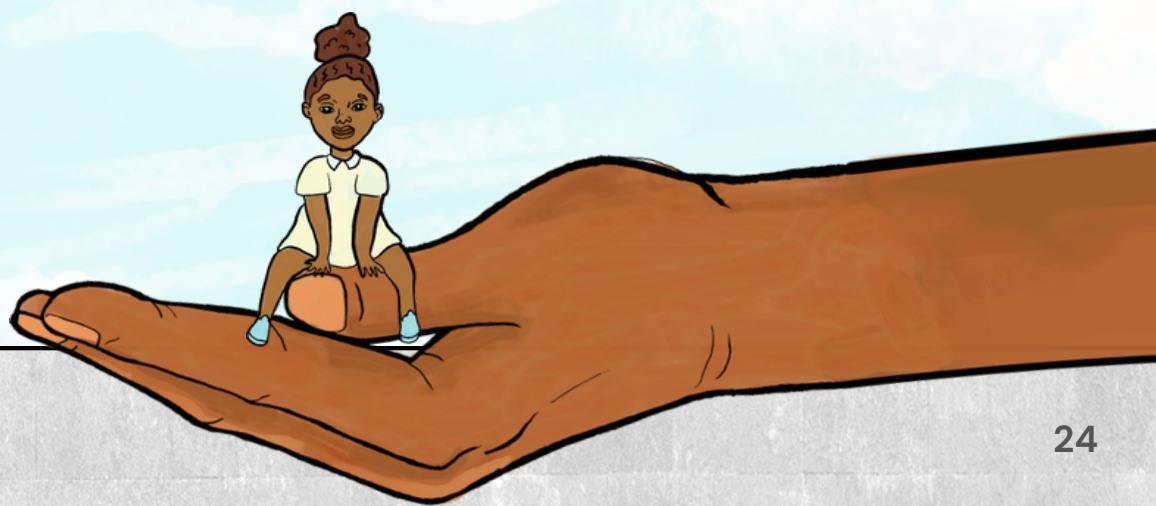
6. WHAT DID WE LEARN?
6.1. INITIAL LEARNING GOALS

At the outset, learning revolved around unearthing the underlying conditions for safety, exploring what safety means for Black and racially minoritised communities, young people and women both in these boroughs and in urban areas more generally? It also involved addressing the question of how feeling safe or unsafe impacts their health and their lives?

We particularly wanted to think about the types of approaches local leaders and community experts might want to take, and gain insights about the system actors and structures they want to focus on. Key questions guiding this phase of work included:

- **What are the conditions needed for people, particularly racialised minorities, women and young people to feel safe in urban areas?**

- **What types of approaches do local experts suggest to enhance the conditions that support safety? What do we do about making the Black community feel safer?**

- **What actors and structures have they identified as key to focus on in the system?**

    - **How do we allow ideas of that safety to emanate from ourselves? How might local experts fund the conditions that foster greater safety in the community?**

6.2. KEY INSIGHTS

" This process has been a beautiful example of what it means to work systemically. The group really worked on the underlying patterns, structures, and mental models that are causing a lack of safety (i.e. racial justice in education, need for ownership of assets, the way funding is structured). They were able to go beyond the superficial, visible level and really looked at the systemic structures that are keeping the problematic situation as it is. "

Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners

The answer to the question "what does safety mean to for Black and other racially minoritised communities?" is not straightforward. Having suffered a history of systemic racism, economic inequality, and social injustice the question of safety is both loaded and multifaceted. This group of community leaders essentially felt empowered with the opportunity to take the detours necessary to dive into the concept of safety and what it means to each of them and their communities.

A safe container and experienced facilitators were a cornerstone in ensuring participants were able to move through the process of defining and reinterpreting what safety meant for them, in the broadest possible terms.

Part of what made the container safe was not just the established social lab methodology, but more critically, the opportunity to take part in a process led by Black and racially minoritised facilitators and participants, and others who have explicitly expressed solidarity with these groups in non-performative ways.

This created a space in which difficult conversations and lived experience could be brought into the room, without the degree of voyeurism, nonrecognition and fragility that might otherwise be expected in white and/or other 'professional' spaces inflected and shaped by whiteness.

" Some group members spoke to me about the safety of being in a largely Black room, with Michael and Yannick as facilitators. They said it is very rare to be in such spaces, and how they exhaled when they came in, knowing they could be themselves in ways that are rarely possible in work settings. "

Radhika Bynon, Portfolio Manager, Impact on Urban Health

Given the exploratory nature of this process, however, one key take away is to acknowledge that some participants will inevitably feel more frustration with detours and protracted nature discussion of the issues – most especially those working around issues of bodily safety and at the hardest ends of systems (e.g. within criminal justice, or domestic violence scenarios). A key learning therefore is the need to balance the need for expansive discussion of the complex issue at hand, and the more immediate needs for action and intervention identified by those community experts and practitioners most negatively impacted by the issue (i.e. a lack of safety).

" I think that there were a couple of meetings where we had to trust. And the process of trusting is really difficult. ...In those difficult conversations, as facilitators, we just had to say, 'No, relax, we'll get there, we'll get there. I promise you. I promise you, we'll get there. ...Even when you yourself are not sure exactly how **"**

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative

Finally, an especially important take-away from the process has been the clear call of local experts who have emphasised through their development of prototypes how communities themselves ought to have an expanded and sustained role in determining how funds are spent to tackle wide-ranging issues of safety. Primarily, this has included the call to ensure support for community organisations which moves beyond project-based financial support and towards long term funding for operational costs and capacity development, which will work to ensure the sustainability of organisations working to address safety on the front lines.

" Whatever we decided about how money should be distributed, one of the key things that our organisations need is non-financial support. Because we might be tackling the right issues; we might be passionate about doing so... but have we got the experience and the skill in order to manage whatever we are supposed to be doing effectively? **"**

Local Expert & Participant

COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDINGS OF SAFETY

For Black and racially minoritised communities in Lambeth and Southwark, safety includes bodily autonomy, psychological, emotional and spiritual safety, a feeling of belonging, a sense of connection to others, freedom and agency, and access to assets, resources and community and institutional power.

Many things undermine a sense of safety for Black and racially minoritised communities including negative and coercive encounters with the state, public services (e.g. criminal justice or education systems) or religious institutions, poverty and lack of access to material wealth, and a lack of connection, power and representation within institutions and public systems.

While funders and policy-makers might see safety primarily through the lens of crime, justice and policing, Black and racially minoritised communities think about safety more broadly.

SAFETY IS A BROAD AND MULTIFACETED CONCEPT WHICH INCLUDES:

FREEDOM TO LIVE YOUR LIFE ON YOUR OWN TERMS

BODILY SAFETY AND AUTONOMY

VS. SOME THINGS THAT UNDERMINE SAFETY:

COERCIVE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OR AN OVER RELIANCE ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY TO SOLVE OR BYPASS PROBLEMS

APATHETIC AND SELFISH/INDIVIDUALISED RESPONSES TO SHARED CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE POLICE AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

EXCLUSION FROM EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING; MARGINALISATION WITHIN EXISTING EDUCATION SERVICES

A LACK OF ASSETS (E.G. BUILDINGS OR SPACES FOR THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY), RESOURCES AND VIABLE PATHWAYS TO BUILDING GENERATIONAL WEALTH

POOR REPRESENTATION WITHIN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS WRIT LARGE

A LACK OF COMMUNITY POWER, AGENCY AND UNITY IN THE FACT OF CHALLENGES
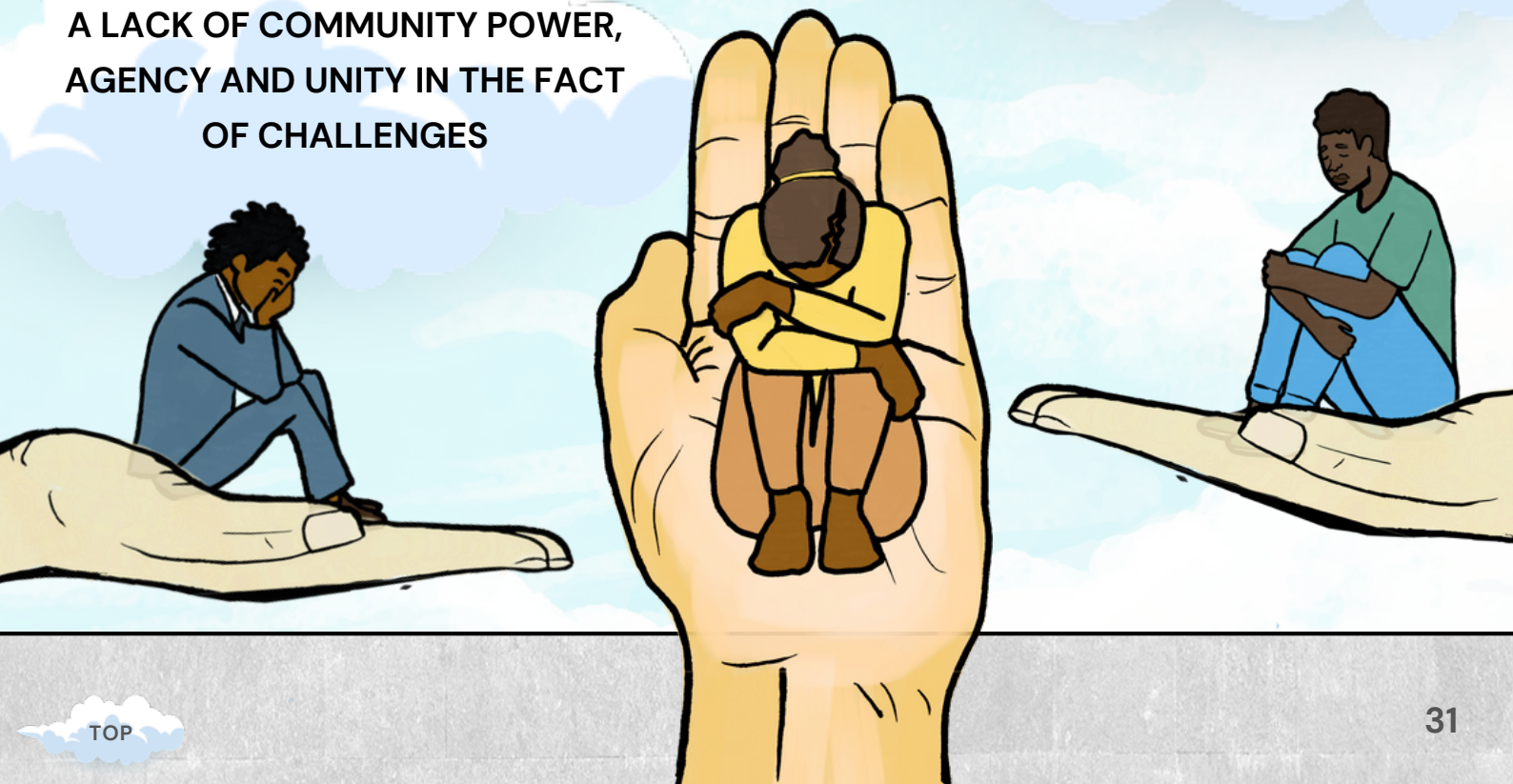
APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

The concepts used throughout this learning report have mostly been defined according to Sanjiv Lingayah and Nina Kellys "A Guide to Talking About Racism" (July, 2023).

Anti-racism
Anti-racism is the practice of identifying and ending racism by changing the values, structures and behaviours that enable it (Lingayah and Kelly 2023).

Black vs black
Most race scholars – especially those focused on anti-black racism – capitalise when referring to Black people of African descent. This is to distinguish people of African descent from other racially minoritised people who identify as politically black (lower case) as part of historical struggles for recognition by the state and systems (Meer 2014: 13).

Coloniality
Coloniality' is a concept first defined by Aníbal Quijano and later developed by Walter Mignolo. Quijano described coloniality as an encompassing political, cultural, epistemological, and symbolic condition (Quijano, 2008). He illustrates coloniality of power as the inter-relationship between modern forms of exploitation and domination, and coloniality of knowledge as the influence of colonialism on domains of knowledge production.

Ethnicity
A related concept to 'race' is ethnicity – used to describe people who share a common history, geography and culture. Ethnicity can be self-selected, whereas 'race' is more usually imposed by others to classify groups in a hierarchy. However, ethnic categories are also socially constructed. And they can be intertwined with or become racial categories, e.g., African-Caribbean, Indian and Muslim, and can also be a basis for racist discrimination (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).

'Race'
'Race' is a socially constructed concept used to group humans, often based on physical appearance. 'Race' was constructed as a hierarchal system of classification to identify and differentiate some groups, in order to elevate some and marginalise others (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).

Racialisation

A dominant concept used to describe the processes through which people come to be seen as members of particular racial and/or ethnic groups (Delgado and Stefancic 2014:8; Meer 2014:125). Processes of racialisation serve as the mechanisms through which individuals are "socialised into a socio-systemic hierarchy" (Suyemoto et al. 2020), in which positive and/or negative attributes and values (i.e. stereotypes) can be ascribed to particular groups, based on their real or imagined shared characteristics, values and attributes. Dominant groups claim possession of superior qualities, corralling power and privilege in ways that uphold their interests, while asserting the inferiority of Others, who remain subservient, marginalised and oppressed (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011).

Racially Minoritised

The term 'Minoritised' points to the active processes of marginalisation involved in racist practice, including the unequal allocation of power, resources and status (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).

Systemic Racism

Systemic racism describes the ways that individual (interpersonal), institutional and structural racism jointly produce harms to Black and racially minoritised people relative to white people. These systems are so deeply set that to reset them requires fundamental, transformational change (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).
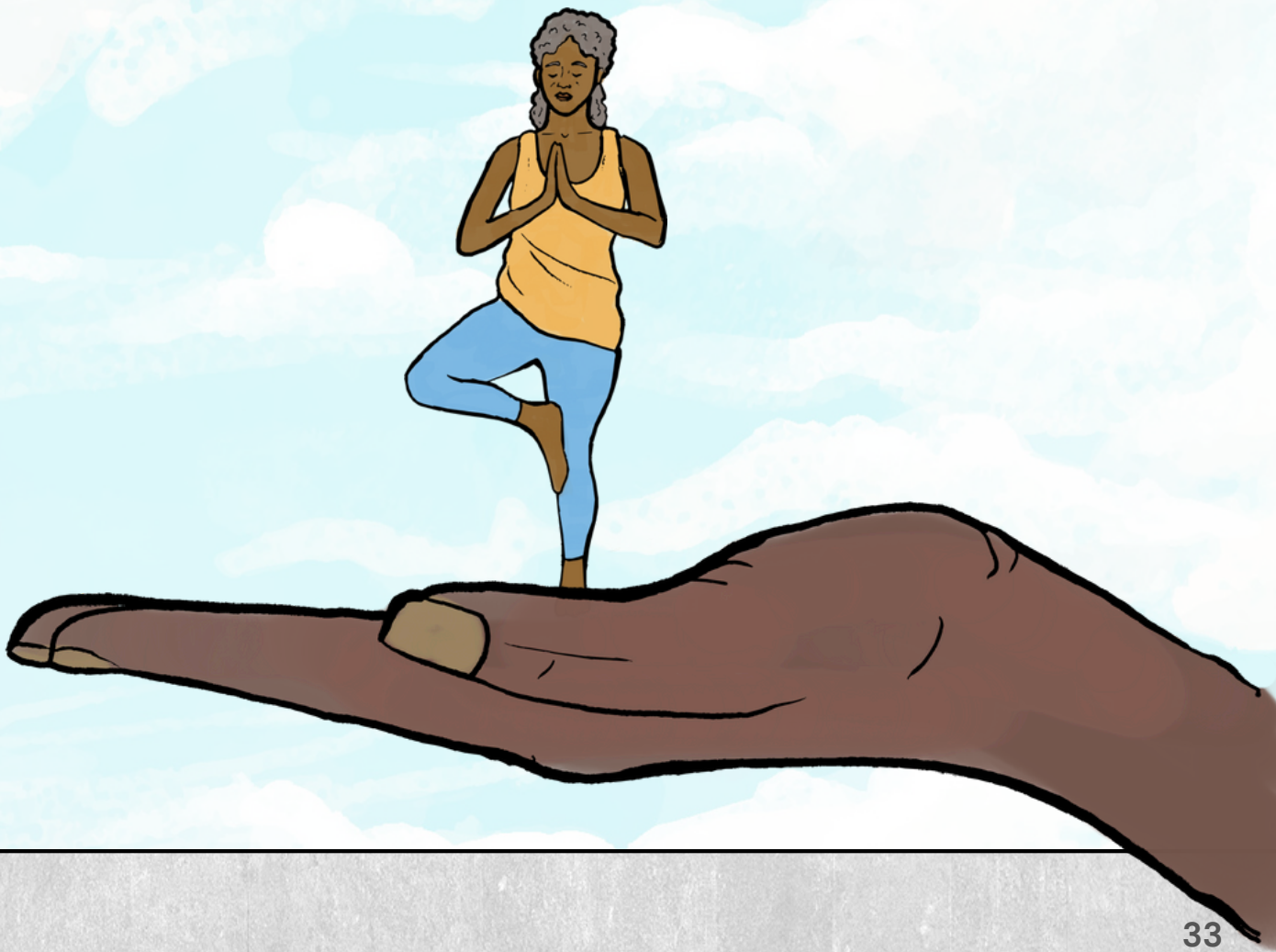
APPENDIX 2: LEARNING METHODOLOGY

Learning from the safety project was led by Ravenna Nuaimy Barker and Sarah Samaha at Reos Partners, an organisation working globally to steward systems change initiatives, and Dr Tamanda Walker, an independent consultant and researcher specialising in race, decolonial theory and Black led systems change efforts.

Sources of Learning

Key insights presented in this report were derived from:

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Four In-Person workshops	A series of four in-person participatory workshops run with a group of community leaders from Lambeth and Southwark in March, May, June and November 2023. These workshops were facilitated by Michael Hamilton (The Ubele Initiative) and Yannick Wassmer (Reos Partners) and systematically documented by Debi Lewinson Roberts (independent consultant).
Five Learning Journeys	A series of five participant-led learning journey sessions with invited experts, including David Bryan, Derek Bardowell, Dr Mahamed Hash, Dr Yansie Rolston and Dr Ariel Breaux Torres, and Dr Joe Montgomery.
Prototyping Sessions	A series of prototyping sessions within and beyond facilitated residentials in which participants developed innovative models to address Black safety issues in Lambeth and Southwark.
15 one-on-one interviews	A total of 15 one-on-one interviews that include the perspectives of 13 project participants.

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Reflection Sessions	A total of two shared reflections on learning from the project with participants – one at the final in–person workshop in November 2023, and a second following an initial draft and write up of the project learning in March 2024. Both sessions were facilitated by Dr Tamanda Walker.
Video transcripts on participant reflections	Transcripts from participant reflections on the process documented in videos on the project and its associated methodologies and processes by Veronica McKenzie of Reel Brit Productions.
Surveys and evaluation	Participant surveys and evaluations undertaken in the middle and at the end of the process.
Periodic reflections from the organising and implementing team	Reflections on the process by members of the Organising, Facilitation and Learning Partnership Teams at Impact on Urban Health, the Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners over the duration of the process.

APPENDIX 3: IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Impact on Urban Health

Impact on Urban Health focus on improving health in inner-city areas, which have some of the most extreme health outcomes. Alongside their vibrancy and diversity sit stark health inequalities. Impact on Urban Health, want to change this. They believe that we can remove obstacles to good health, by making urban areas healthier places for everyone to live. IoUH focus on complex health issues that disproportionately impact people living in urban areas. They partner with others to make the biggest impact. And are a part of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation, working to support health in Lambeth and Southwark.

The Ubele Initiative

The Ubele Initiative, is an African diaspora led, infrastructure plus organisation, empowering Black and racially minoritised and Minoritised communities in the UK, to act as catalysts for social and economic change. To achieve this, they work with community leaders, groups, and organisations in the UK and beyond to strengthen their sustainability, resilience, and voice.

Ubele is taken from Swahili meaning 'the future'.

Reos Partners

Reos Partners, established 2007, is an international social enterprise that helps people move forward together on their most important and intractable issues. Reos leads processes that enable teams of stakeholders—even those who don't understand or agree with or trust one another—to make progress on their toughest challenges. Reos' approach is systemic, collaborative, and creative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS