



WHO  
ASKED  
YOU  
?





# THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

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**[Scene:** Lunchtime, Withy Trees Day Centre,  
I am sitting next to Brenda at the table.]

**Brenda:** I've seen you before.  
**Me:** Yes, we've met, here.  
**Brenda:** Weren't you with that  
policeman?  
**Me:** No.  
**Brenda:** [holds her hand over my  
forehead]: Yes it was you,  
with that policeman.  
**Care-worker:** There was a woman who came  
in with a police officer. You  
maybe look a bit like her.  
**Brenda:** Is it hard to be in the  
police?  
**Me:** I'm not in the police.  
**Brenda:** I've seen you before.  
**Me:** Well maybe I look like her,  
that woman. I was on the bus  
with you a few weeks ago.  
**Brenda:** Yes, you were placing things  
around the edge, that's right.  
I thought so.

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From April to December 2013 I had the privilege of being writer-in-residence at Withy Trees Day Centre and CSV Learning North West, as part of the artist residency programme, *Where The Heart Is*. My residency looked to explore ideas of home and care in two very different settings: a day centre used by people living with dementia, and an alternative education provider for 14-24 year olds.

It was a rich and challenging time, filled with stories and silences, revelations and gaps. I have chosen to create a series of nine separate texts for this publication: nine glimpses into my time at CSV and Withy Trees; nine different ways of responding to the stories I've been told and experiences I've had throughout the residency. They are loosely grouped in threes. Each trio includes a short story inspired by a person, comment or observation; an edited conversation and series of portraits created with young people at CSV; and a personal essay, which reflects on a particular theme and is punctuated with scenes and exchanges that happened during the residency. My hope is that each of the texts stands alone, and at the same time connects with and speaks to the other texts around it. For me the spaces in between the pieces are perhaps as important as the words within them.

*Where The Heart Is* has given me the opportunity to think differently and deeply about home and agency, language and control. I am grateful to the people I have met and spoken with over the course of the residency, who have welcomed me into their spaces and lives with such generosity, warmth and good humour.



# CHRISTMAS JUMPER

A small house in the middle of an estate of small houses – neat brown bricks; white wooden panelling below white PVC windows. A rectangle of lawn at the front, dandelions feathered yellow amongst the grass. A bigger rectangle of lawn at the back, the tree still lying across it, reaching its fingers for the back door. Everyone had got upset about the tree – *could have killed you, could have damaged the house* – but all it had done was fall quite slowly, with a gentle, keening sound. He had watched it from his bedroom window and wondered how it knew it was time.

The women who pick him up are always the same women. They smile. They know where he keeps things. They know his name, and say it over and over like it's some kind of charm. He worries they think he is rude, forgetting their names each time they come.

He's in bed, but he's dressed, which means that the other people – who aren't always the same and don't always know his name – must have been in earlier. He thinks, for a moment, of all the keys to his house spread out across the town, and how big a pile, how much noise they would make, if someone collected them and gave them back to him.



The women want him to get up and so he does. 'You'll need a jumper,' they say, and he wonders how they know. Last Christmas's jumper is white with a thin red stripe around the chest – a little prickly on the skin, but warm. It is lying on the chair as if it's waiting for him, but when he pulls in on, it catches on his head and all at once he is lost.

His daughter buys him a jumper every Christmas. To protect him, she says, though she's never said what from and he's never asked. She gets him a different one each year and so he assumes their protective powers only last twelve months, though he can't bring himself to throw away the old ones. Jammed over his head, the jumper muffles the voices of the women in his bedroom. He can feel it tickle at his face and senses the world turned white and straightforward.

He is a man who has travelled more than most, who used to think nothing of jumping from a plane with only a parcel of silk between him and instant death. His daughter must mean fate, he thinks, as one of the women pulls gently at the jumper and his head pops out and the world returns to its complications. He looks down at the tree lying across the back garden and smooths his hands over the white wool. It is good, he thinks, to have that kind of protection, for whatever this day holds in store.



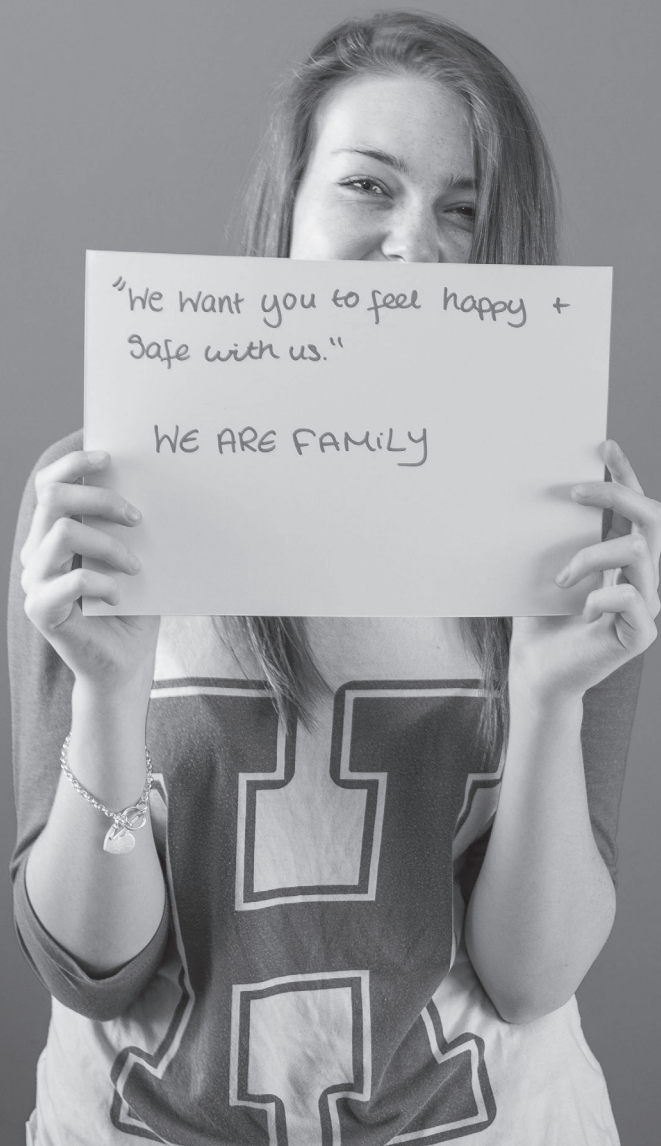
# MECHILA



*Mechila at home*

If I didn't smoke I'd probably, I don't know, I'd set the cat on fire or something. I have to take sleeping pills – from the hospital – because I had an incident: my dad had proper gone for me at the house, and he'd thrown me down the front steps, and I came home and I was like I've had enough of it. So I went in the bathroom and completely fucked myself up. Like all my arms and everything. By the time Jarek got into the bathroom – he realised the bathroom light was on but there was no noise, and he was like 'what the fuck?', so he went to get Chris and Chris barged the bathroom door down. There's no lock on it anymore. And I got taken to hospital, and got sleeping pills. And it's shit.

I'm not even depressed to be honest, it's just in that moment. I'd never ever think about killing myself or anything, it was in that moment I was like 'fuck this'. I don't even know what I was thinking. Whatever's in my head, I'll just do it.



Mechila at CSV



I'm living with my boyfriend now. He's Polish. He lives on my dad's street. He used to fly a toy helicopter in the street and we met and got talking. My Polish's not so bad, but it's not great either. I had a proper stress the other day. We were all sat there the other night, and they were all talking in Polish and I got up and just came upstairs, and Chris was like 'what's wrong with you?' I was like 'if you're going to fucking talk in Polish don't expect me to sit there and try and be a part of it.' And then I went down to get my phone and everyone was like 'what's wrong with you? what's wrong with you?' and I just flipped. I went mental. Mike came up and said, 'I'm sorry, I'm going to talk with you in English now.'

I feel more at home there than I've ever felt anywhere. I think it's because I've never had that like stable family environment, and now I've got it, and I've got good support. There's always someone in the house with me, whereas when I was at my dad's I was always on my own. I had to fend for myself a lot. I mean, I fend for myself in this new house: I make my own food, I clean the place, but it's nice to have people there. Especially like – if I'm sad or something, they'll see I'm sad and they won't leave me on my own, whereas if I was sad at my dad's he wouldn't care at all, he'd just be like – 'more alcohol'. So it's nice, just to have that good support.

I see my dad walking our dog on the street sometimes, or when he takes her to the big park – he puts her in the car and I just look out of the window. We named her after one of the gremlins, because she had a spiky thing at the back of her neck – Gizmo.

I will admit I am depressed a lot of the time. I hate being on my own. I have too much time to think and I can't sleep at night time and then I'll try and sleep during the day, and then I'm awake at night time thinking about everything again. I'm not afraid to admit that I do over-think things and it does just make my situation worse. I'm trying to not let it drag me down, but just get on with it and be appreciative for what I've got now, and just see what happens. I'm not as strong as I make out, though.





*Mechila at home*

I definitely don't want to stay in England, definitely not Preston either. I don't want to be stuck in the same place for my entire life. The world's a lot bigger than just England. I want to experience everything. I don't want to be 70 years old and say to my grandchildren: 'Well I've been sat here knitting for the past 60 years. I've got a couple of cats, I got a takeaway last night, and that's my life achievements.' I want to be able to say: 'I went to China and I did this, and I met these people and we stayed here or we did this or I've worked in this place.' I don't want to be one of these people who are just sat there. I want to do something with myself. I want to do something that's going to make some kind of contribution.



# INCANTATIONS

As a child, I was entranced by my grandmother's gold charm bracelet. I can't remember if she wore it that often, or whether it was a matter of persuading her to let me lift it from her jewellery box and work my way around the charms: the intricate royal carriage; the car with wheels that turned on their thin gold axles; the tea cup; crown; beer jug; violin; a heart that looked like it should be a locket but didn't open. I can list them, because now her bracelet belongs to me, picked from the boxes of jewellery left behind when she died, just three months before *Where The Heart Is* began.

At Withy Trees Day Centre I meet Bea, short, wiry, tanned, always immaculately turned out, always wearing gold: necklaces, earrings, and a bracelet with the same circular links as my grandmother's, with her own collection of charms hanging from them.

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**Bea:** [looking at the gold charm bracelet on her wrist] Every charm's for a memory.

**Me:** [Pointing] What's this one?

**Bea:** I don't remember that one.

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I told Bea about my grandmother's charm bracelet, and my favourite charm: a gypsy caravan whose roof flipped up to reveal a crystal ball. That evening when I got home I looked at the bracelet and discovered that there was no gypsy caravan, only a carriage, whose top doesn't lift up to reveal anything. And I remembered – or at least I pieced together – that I had had a charm bracelet too, made from silver. I think my grandparents must have bought it for me; I have no idea where it is or what happened to it, but I'm pretty sure that it was me who had a caravan whose roof flipped up to show a crystal ball.



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**Me:** Do you have a favourite?  
**Bea:** I like the mill.  
**Me:** The windmill?  
**Bea:** Yes.  
**Me:** And what's that memory?  
**Bea:** Do you know, I can't remember.

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Historically, charms were made and worn to ward off evil spirits. The bracelets of Bea and my gran are no doubt from the 1950s or 60s, when charm bracelets were fashion items, but there is still something totemic about them. There is still the sense of them as holders of memory, of experiences, of their owner's personality and preferences.

This summer, I went to Morecambe for the weekend. We arrived early in the afternoon on the Saturday. It was raining so hard you could barely make out the sea, and we ducked into an antiques shop on Marine Road Central to shelter. It was an archetypal Aladdin's cave: tables piled with comics and gaudy lamps; a cluster of ceramic dogs; glittering glass cabinets crammed with cutlery and ornaments, jewellery and army badges. And there, in amongst rings and necklaces, cuff links and watches, a curved piece of black velvet draped with gold charm bracelets. Sixteen strings of discarded memories.

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**Bea:** Those boxing gloves are from one of my sister's friends. He was a boxer and he taught me.  
**Me:** Are you a boxer?  
**Bea:** I'm not a qualified one, but I can hold my own. I was coming home from a dance one night. I was coming up by the prison - you won't know this, it was at Ribblesdale - and I heard these footsteps behind me, and I thought



'oh dear me.' Anyway, so I felt the hand on my shoulder. I turned round, kneed him, and as he was coming down, bang, bang on the back of his neck. I left him lying out. I thought 'I wonder if I've killed him.' And I daren't tell my mother because she'd have gone mad. I mean she wouldn't have got mad about me hitting him, but – Though when you think about it, incidents like that were few and far between, you could walk around all hours of night. Now, young people daren't walk out, they're all in cars. I feel so sorry for them, I mean they miss half their life.

**Hilda:** I remember I used to carry a darning needle, and my brother said, 'you'll never use it,' I mean you'd never have the courage to stick a darning needle in, would you?

**Bea:** I stuck a knife in a bloke one night.

**Me:** Did you?

**Bea:** Yes I did. And I meant it. And I kept looking at paper and thinking – and I daren't tell my mum, you know, and my dad. Mind you, my dad would have said 'good for you, lass.'

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The word *charm* comes from the Latin *carmen*, meaning: song, verse, oracular response, incantation. The women at Withy Trees often break into song as they talk to me and each other – humming a refrain to take us back to the time they are thinking of. Music and song is something that connects the older people at Withy Trees and the young people at CSV, and that has a sense of the magical, the ceremonial, the incantatory in each space. It is a place of safety at Withy Trees: people who



struggle to find the right words to express what they want to say, recognise a song from its opening bars and sing every verse word-perfect. One woman I've spent time with gets extremely agitated and upset, but when she sings she smiles and her face relaxes.

At CSV, I watch Natalie rehearse a song for her assessed performance. She has a sore throat, her voice husky, but she's determined, and sings the song again and again to get it right. Staff tell me that when she first arrived at CSV she refused to engage with anything, but within months she was singing live on CSV's termly TV show. I also meet Aidan and Liam, rappers who write their own lyrics, and invest what money they have in recording tracks and creating videos to go with their words and beats. Music is stitched into these young people's lives – created, copied, rehearsed, repeated, shared, performed, over and again.

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**Me:** This is a ballerina. Do you remember this one?

**Bea:** [pause] Yes [long pause] I've always loved dancing. There's nowhere to go now to dance. I feel sorry for young people. There's nowhere for them to go.

**Me:** What kind of dancing did you do?

**Bea:** Ballroom. All the churches had dance halls. If you had the money you could dance every night.

**Me:** What was your favourite dance?

**Bea:** Tango.

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Bea and I work around the circle of her charm bracelet. Some of the charms yield their stories, some don't. As we go, it strikes me that there isn't a beginning or an end. The bracelet is not a linear chronology, but something to be picked up at whichever point we choose. To be repeated over and again.



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**Me:** Is this one a Flamenco dancer?  
**Bea:** We used to do a lot of dancing.  
Latin American. And I feel sorry for  
children now, because they've nowhere  
to go at night. We used to have  
church halls. If you had the money  
you could dance every night of the  
week.

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Withy Trees is a place of repetition. A structured day: breakfast, lunch and tea always at the same time. And the people I talk to repeat their stories for me, again and again. Don't we all? We tell and retell the stories we have selected as ours, as important, as part of ourselves. And as we tell and retell we change things: emphasise this, omit that. We build ourselves, and keep ourselves together, through our narratives and our repetitions. At CSV, I have a series of conversations over several months with five young people, and they tell me the same stories again and again. Sometimes they will give more or less detail. Sometimes the stories are slightly different, even contradictory, but then these young people's lives and opinions are in constant flux. Their stories are not as fixed as the ones I hear at Withy Trees, but, in all cases, there is a circularity and a comfort in that circularity, as if each repetition builds something subtler, stronger. As if repetition might also be rehearsal, each time offering the opportunity for change.

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**[Scene:** Avenham Park, Preston. A is filming.  
K is presenting. L is supervising. I am  
helping K learn his lines for each section.  
The theme is 'home'. The text has been  
downloaded from the internet. Some of it  
doesn't make much sense and we re-write it  
as we go. K learns the line: 'homes are  
made of walls, windows and doors'. A films K



saying the line walking up a narrow stone stairwell from the river up to the bridge.]

**K:** (confidently) Walls are made of walls, windows and doors.

**Me:** K, it's homes.

**K:** What?

**Me:** It's homes. Homes are made of walls, windows and doors.

**K:** Yeah.

**Me:** You're saying walls. You're saying walls are made of walls, windows.

**K:** Am I?

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**Me:** So this is a dolphin?

**Bea:** Fish.

**Me:** And another fish. Why the fish?

**Bea:** [pause] I don't know. They just take your fancy.

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I don't think I ever asked my gran why she had those charms rather than any others. I was just interested in the charms for their own sake: the two fish facing either way; the wishbone, the stringless violin. And now she has gone, and the untold stories with her, the objects remain. I think about the sixteen gold bracelets in the display cabinet in Morecambe and wonder who will buy them and how often and for how long they will wear them.

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**Me:** [turning bracelet] I don't want to hurt your wrist.

**Bea:** Oh you won't hurt it. My husband used to say 'you've got skin like an elephant you.'

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At CSV I meet Shannon. She has three visible tattoos on her hands: *Nan*, *Mum* and *Grandad*. The tattoo of Grandad has two birds flying up from the text, one with open wings, one with closed. When I ask why, she says: 'because he was all closed up when he was ill, and then he was free, when he died.' A lot of the young people at CSV have tattoos, or have plans to get them. Many signify family relationships; others are about dreams for the future. Mechila has *If today was your last* tattooed in beautiful script along the curve of her collar bone, 'to remind me,' she says. I ask about the tattoo on her right arm:

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**Mechila:** It's beauty in Spanish.

**Me:** And what's the bit coming out the top? Are they birds?

**Michela:** No, it's a Chinese symbol for dad.

**Me:** For?

**Mechila:** Dad.

**Me:** When did you get that?

**Mechila:** This was like one of the first tattoos I ever got.

**Me:** How many have you got?

**Mechila:** Four. It's my birthday in three days. I'm going to get another one. It's like a dreamcatcher. But my dad's like, 'No.' He says 'You've got enough and you're only 16.' He hates them. He's covered in them as well, but he says it's one of the stupidest things he's ever done. But I said to him: 'You can't judge me off your mistakes. Just cos you've got women's names all over you.'

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Whilst Bea's charm bracelet is something she can choose to wear or leave at home, these young people are collecting permanent markers on their bodies – reminding them of people and moments in their lives; declaring and performing their identities. These markers do not have a physical existence outside of their 'owners'. When they die, there won't be an object left to be inherited by a relative or displayed for sale in an antique shop by the sea.

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**Me:** And what's this? A teapot?  
**Bea:** My mum was still dancing when she was 93.  
**Me:** Really?  
**Bea:** And she was in the mill half a day when she was 10. And we had two invalids. My father had been gassed in the war, and my sister had chronic asthma. So - we saw a lot of sickness.  
**Me:** So how old are you now?  
**Bea:** 83.  
**Me:** 83. So what's the teapot? Is it a teapot?  
**Bea:** Yes.  
**Me:** Do you remember that one?  
**Bea:** Oh yes. [long pause] that was one my sister's boyfriend bought me. [long pause. Sound of traffic on road]  
**Me:** They are beautiful.

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A gold teapot. An inked word. And me, sat at my computer making black marks on a white screen; travelling in circles from the first pages of my notebook to the last, looking for the links between one charm and another, trying to write an incantation.



# THE GIRL WHO LIVED ON A BUS STOP

For Natalie

What people didn't understand was that living on the bus stop was better than living in the other place. At least it wasn't something to be embarrassed about. Up on the roof, she could see across the houses towards the hills; lie and stare at the clouds shape-shifting; or turn over and look through the scratched plastic at the heads of the people below. She got to recognise the regulars from the way they parted their hair or the shape and colour of their hats. Sure, it was cold sometimes, and lonely, but it meant she never had to run for a bus, she was never late for an appointment, she was always ready to go.

Not many people noticed her up there. Those that did fell into three camps: the ones who got worked up about it, who shouted at her and demanded she come down – *right now, miss, right this minute*; the ones who looked away and pretended they hadn't seen her, though the way they stood, tense and fidgety, showed that they had; and the ones who found the whole thing hilarious, who pointed and laughed and took photos on their phones.

There was a man though, who did none of those things. He looked like a mix of Daniel Craig and her art teacher at school, before they said they didn't want her back. He was on the 08:12 every morning, sitting on the top deck on her side. When the bus stopped he'd turn to look at her and place his palm against the window, fingers spread. She'd reach out and match her hand to his, the glass cold and gritty between them. They would stay there, frozen, until the bus pulled away. He never got off the bus to talk to her. She never got on the bus to talk to him. It was enough to have this.

# DANIEL & SHAKIRA



*Daniel and Shakira at CSV*



**Daniel:** Before this flat we were staying in a hostel.

**Shakira:** It weren't good really, were it?

**Daniel:** It's a 12 bedroom place for people who are waiting for a flat. But it's not the best, it's quite trumpy, scummy.

**Shakira:** I was living with my mum at first. Then I got kicked out of there, and then I moved into his, but it was only meant to be for like a week or something until I got myself sorted out, and then I ended up staying for like a year or something, and then something kicked off.

**Daniel:** My sister's boyfriend robbed a load of money off us.

**Shakira:** Off the top of his wardrobe and that.

**Daniel:** So I give him a pasting.

**Shakira:** We got kicked out and that.

**Daniel:** We were sofa-surfing for about four and a half month at mates of mine.

**Shakira:** It was probably a bit longer than that to be honest.

**Daniel:** But then we started getting ill – we couldn't do it anymore, so then we kind of swallowed our pride and went to the council and said 'Look, we're homeless, we need somewhere to live.'

**Shakira:** They didn't like us, to be honest, because every time that I've been in there I've kicked off with them because they're just like, you know...

**Daniel:** They don't like me.

**Shakira:** They're not helpful, they don't care like. Just because they're all like happy and everything, they're not that bothered.

**Daniel:** We were there bang on a year. One room. It were wrecking relationship. And then the housing rang us up one morning, and just said 'You're moving today to Leyland.' And we said 'We don't want to move to Leyland.' And they went 'Well that is what's happening, otherwise you're going to be out on the streets.' We've had a year battle with them, with solicitors and stuff. I was a bit naughty when I was a kid. They seem to think I'm still misbehaving but I'm not, I've not been misbehaving for ages.



*Daniel and Shakira in their flat in Leyland*

**Daniel:** There are five flats. It's alright. The lady next door, she's an alcoholic, she lived in the hostel with us. She's harmless enough, but when she's had a beer she gets a bit loud. And then she knocks and wants to come in and you can't get rid of her. She's just lonely. It's alright every now and again. But then she's sat there and she starts repeating herself. We haven't got a washing machine and she lets us do all our washing next door.

We've had some people come round from Barnardos. They've give us a toaster, a sandwich maker, new bedding, new quilts, loads of pans, a new Hoover. Then we went into town one day, when we had a win off the bookies, we won 250 quid off 50p. We bought a mirror which fell off the wall and smashed. Then we put another mirror up straight away and then that fell off, so we've decided not to put a mirror up there anymore. We bought them pictures, we bought that unit, bought this table which was an absolute nightmare to carry home from Preston. We're moving into a new flat soon. Apparently it was abandoned, so there's been a lot of work to be done to it.





**Shakira:** Apparently loads of like smack heads lived in them, but they've cleared them all out and they're doing it up. It's going to be a really nice area, so I think that'll be good for us.

**Daniel:** Also these Barnardos people, they're getting the whole house carpeted for us, we're getting a brand new washer, a brand new dryer, and Housing – if it requires it, which I think it will – they'll give us a decorating voucher, you know to put wallpaper up and stuff.

**Shakira:** I want to get a big mirror. A really really big mirror. I want a really long one, a really fat one.

**Daniel:** We'll be quite glad to be out of here to be honest with you, there's a few people who I know up here who aren't very nice people. People I've known from Preston before I got with Shakira and stuff. People you'd rather stay away from and stuff. Luckily they're all in jail at the minute, and we should be gone by the time they get out.



*Daniel and Shakira in their new flat*



**Daniel:** My dream house? Just a big house with a big fishing pond in back of it.

**Shakira:** It's good, fishing, I like it, it's relaxing. I just watch him at the moment, because I don't have my own tackle.

**Daniel:** I like fishing. I've got a short fuse. I get angry over little things. If I feel a bit pissed off I'll just sit there and chill out. It's good if we have an argument, I'll go out for a couple of hours while she gets ready. If I go fishing I'll be alright. Just chills me out. Especially on a nice day like the last time. We'd had a BBQ the day before. We took the leftover food and a few bottles of beer, and just sat there fishing all day and caught a massive tan.

**Shakira:** That were nice though, that, weren't it?

**Daniel:** I've got a bad temper on me sometimes, but I try and keep it under wraps, since I've been with Shakira. You've got me out of it haven't you really? I was a very bad tempered person, I used to fight all the time and stupid stuff like that. Especially in that hostel as well – I'd find myself getting arrested and stuff because I was losing my temper that much with people. I was getting quite aggressive, not towards her but towards other people, the slightest thing, I'd look for an excuse just to lose my rag.

**Shakira:** I think that's one of the reasons they kept us in there for so long. Because they knew what we were like. They knew about me and they knew about him. They wanted to test us really. He's got a history of going into places and going mad at people, and I do the same like, when they get on your nerves and stuff. I calm him down, and he calms me down.

**Daniel:** We complement each other. But if we kick off at the same time it's quite a bad thing.



# WHERE'S HOME FOR YOU?

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**Marge:** [Withy Trees] I can't wait to get here, and then I can't wait to get home.

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Every morning, two mini-buses set off from Withy Trees Day Centre to do the pick-up, two care workers in each bus. They discuss the most efficient route before they leave, often using past service users' homes as landmarks to navigate by. Every afternoon, the buses leave Withy Trees to take people home. There is a palpable sense of waiting in the hour before departure, people who have been quite calm and content throughout the day start showing anxiety: 'Is it time to go home now? I want to go home.'

One afternoon, I go along on the afternoon bus. I sit in the back, next to Brenda, who worries about whether I know where to get off (I struggle to explain that I'm just there for the ride). It feels too intrusive to go inside people's homes, so I stay on the bus while Diane and Flora take people to their front door. Some are met by family members, others live alone. Every time we stop, I see a slice of each person's home – a thin glimpse of turquoise carpet; a dado rail; white wallpaper; a door opening off a hallway; a phone charger trailing across laminate floor.

The following week I arrive early to go out on the morning pick-up. The staff encourage me to get off the bus with them, and I find, in the few moments I am inside each person's house, a context for them which I had not had before: the family photos; the texture of the walls; the view from the back window; the clutter on one table and the lack of it on another.

These glimpses – half-seen, half-imagined realities – encapsulate my own feelings about 'home': something that I struggle to hold on to; something that I can't quite define or describe my own relationship with.





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**[Scene:** Withy Trees Day Centre. Brenda and I sit next to each other on green armchairs. She has been asking me to take her home on and off for about an hour.]

**Brenda:** Are you coming?

**Me:** Coming where?

**Brenda:** Are you coming?

**Me:** Am I coming where, Brenda?

**Brenda:** Oh, [looks crestfallen] I don't know.  
To the next place?

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My role in *Where The Heart Is* is described as 'writer-in-residence' – a common term in the arts world, with an interesting, and often inaccurate relationship to the word 'residence'. Throughout the residency, which explicitly took the theme of home, I have found myself observing how I attempt to make myself at home within my host's environments: how I gravitate towards kitchens and kettles and cups of tea; how I end up choosing particular places or chairs I feel most comfortable in; how I learn the routine of a place and create my own within it.

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**[Scene:** Withy Trees Day Centre. I am sat at a table with Gerry.]

**Me:** Whereabouts do you live?

**Gerry:** I live near the hospital. [pauses]  
Are we in the hospital?

**Me:** No.

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[A and L, two young men from CSV, discuss where L will sleep that evening.]

A: Have you got a plan?

L: Yeah – find somewhere comfortable and lie down.

A: [raises eyebrows]

L: I shall stay at... [pauses, shrugs]  
The world's my oyster. There are six billion people in this world, someone's got to put me up.

---

Home. It's a tricky word, a tricky concept. For some, home is a place of stability and safety. For others it is difficult, abusive, precarious. Throughout my time at CSV and Withy Trees, catching glimpses of other people's lives and homes, I have found myself acutely aware of how much control I have over where I call home, compared to many of the people I've been working with. This residency has also made me think more deeply about how, for all of us, in different ways, home is perhaps more of a process than a specific, fixed place. It is something we create – through our actions and our habits; the objects we choose to buy and display; and the stories we tell about ourselves. Home, perhaps, is not simply one place or another place, but a creative, dynamic process, intimately tied up with our identity. How much control we have over it – how temporary or permanent our home feels, how much choice we have about where it is and when we might choose to change it – can have a profound impact on our sense of self and our place in the world.



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[A canvas on the wall at Daniel and Shakira's, which they bought when they moved from a hostel into their first flat: white writing on a black background.]

Home is where the heart is  
Honey I'm home  
Happiness is homemade  
There's no place like home  
My house my rules  
Home sweet home

---

At Withy Trees, Maria, the Centre Manager, talks about their focus on helping people maintain their independence and stay at home. When she mentions former 'service users' who have moved into residential homes she talks about sadness and uses the verb 'to lose': 'We lost them.' These are people who must fight (or have others to fight on their behalf) to stay in their homes. Home is something constantly under question. It is something that can be taken away, and replaced with another version of 'home' which is entirely different, despite the name.

At CSV, I talk to young people who have difficult relationships with their families, who have been kicked out or have chosen to leave, and who are trying to negotiate the intricacies of the housing system in order to get somewhere to stay; or finding other informal arrangements – at boyfriends' and girlfriends' houses, or on friends' sofas. They are doing their best to settle, to make a home, to put down roots. There is, however, always the sense that things could change with little warning; a sense that they have to play a game to get what they need; and the feeling that they are not always in control of the choices being made.



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**[Scene:** CSV. The low table is covered with squares of old newspaper, some of which have been stuck onto a shallow wooden box. Rob has been asking the young people to decide what they would put in the box if it was to contain everything they needed to create a home. I have been asking the young people where they most feel at home. Neither conversation has been very productive.]

**Natalie:** [running in] Rob said I have to tell you I live on a bus stop.  
[previously she's told me she doesn't feel at home anywhere]

**Me:** A bus stop?

**Natalie:** Yeah, I get on top of it sometimes. That's why I'm never late.

**Me:** Right.

**Natalie:** If I tell people I live where I live, I might as well say I'm Looney Tunes. They'd leave me alone after that.

[I write Natalie a story, called 'The Girl Who Lived On The Bus Stop'. Next time I'm at CSV she turns round to me, half way through the morning.]

**Natalie:** You [shouting]

**Me:** Hi

**Natalie:** You wrote that story.

**Me:** Did you like it?

**Natalie:** Yeah. But did I sleep with Daniel Craig?

**Me:** That's for you to decide.

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Maria talks to me at length about her frustration with the sudden switch from 'at home' to 'in a home' that many of their 'service users' experience, and which, for some, signals a rapid decline in their health and sense of independence. As she speaks, I think about Aidan and Shelia in a mother and baby unit in Preston, pleased to have five doors between them and the street; and about Daniel and Shakira in their first temporary flat. Both couples described their situation as being some kind of a test; a middle ground between a family home (or in both their cases a homeless hostel) and their own permanent place. There is not, it seems, a similar in-between place for many of the people who attend Withy Trees Day Centre, no place to ease the transition from one kind of home to another, that allows for dignity and safety and independence.

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**Daniel:** [leans against the door frame of the new, permanent flat, he shares with Shakira] I'm going to go college after Christmas. I'm going to go Preston, try to learn a trade or summat. I'm sick of getting dead end jobs, shit money, I'm sick of it. We've got this place now so I might as well find a decent job. I've just applied for an apprenticeship as well.

---

Just before starting *Where The Heart Is*, my first novel was published. It tells the story of a homeless man's search for his daughter, and a young woman's struggle with her sense of rootlessness. I chose to include an epigraph from John Clare's diaries, which reads: *so here I am homeless at home and half gratified to feel I can be happy any where*. It's a phrase that resonated the moment I heard it, seeming to encapsulate the idea of home as a process that holds both comfort and tension, both security and fragility; home as something that is ongoing and ever changing, and yet an anchor also, something to hold onto, something worth fighting for.



# PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN EATING A SCONE

Lunch is chicken pie, new potatoes, overcooked veg. Pudding is a scone, sliced in half and stuffed with jam and cream.

'Well, what's this?' A man at her table picks up his scone, holding only the top half; the whole thing stays stuck together.

'It's a scone,' the woman next to him says.

She recognises this woman, but she doesn't know where from. Even when she holds her hand over the woman's forehead and concentrates on her eyes, she still can't place her.

'Well, it's hard.' The man drops his scone onto the table and averts his eyes.

It is hard. Hard to find on the plate, hard to break with her spoon, which often comes up to her mouth with nothing on it. But she perseveres. She is used to this – one tiny piece at a time; that's how things get done.

She is nearly finished when he arrives.

He stands next to her chair. 'What are you doing?'

She is eating a scone.

'There's nothing on your spoon.'

There is nothing on her spoon.

'You can't see because you haven't got your glasses on.'

There is cream on her fingers but when she wipes them it doesn't come off.

'You always forget to put your glasses on, don't you?' He takes hold of the glasses, hung on a cord around her neck, and shakes them.



She slots them onto her face. Picks up her spoon. Tries again. The metal slides against the scone.

'Just pick it up, mother.' He takes the spoon from her and prods at the remaining bit of scone with his finger. 'Just pick it up.'

She reaches for the spoon, but he won't let her have it. She looks at him but he is staring at the scone.

'What are you doing? Do you not want it?'

She wants it. She wants to eat it with the spoon, the same way she ate the rest of it.

He is angry. She knows him. He has been angry before.

The bit of scone is still on the plate. The cream is still on her fingers.

'Are you done?' he says.

She isn't done.

She pulls her shoulders back, sits up straight and says, 'No, I'm done.' Then she gathers up her bag from her lap, looping the strap between her fingers, which are still sticky with cream. She stands up. He is taller than her. He will take her home.

'You're not coming with me.' He sounds frightened. 'You're staying here.'

He turns and walks towards the door, out onto the street. She stays standing until someone takes her arm and tells her to sit back down.

The woman she recognises, but can't quite place, sees it all, but says nothing.



AIDAN



Aidan and Shelia at CSV





Growing up where I did, I wasn't an ordinary kid. Until 15 I had lived with my mum on Greenland's. Everything was fine until around my second year of high school – that's where things took a rapid decline. At the age of 15 I was told to leave my mother's and go in search of a new home. At the time I was hanging around in the wrong crowd, dealing with a lot. It was a weird time in my life that I wish I could go back and change, but then again I guess I wouldn't be the person I am today. So after living with my mum due to things going south with my step dad, I went to live with my wonderful nana for roughly six weeks, one of the easiest times of my life. Being treated like a prince, having my every need tended to, really made me feel like I could rebuild and start again.

At the end of the six weeks I eventually had to move to my dad's in Avenham. It was very different to what I had experienced at my nana or my mum's: having to learn how to cook, clean, wash and dry clothes, all the skills that everyone needs to learn at some point or another – I was chunked in at the deep end. My dad was rarely present, so I spent a lot of the time alone, having my friends come stay with me so I wasn't lonely. They was my family, kept me safe, helped me when I was down, gave me a much needed boost in life to pursue my dreams of a rap career.

After that, my dad came back and took me to live in Penwortham. At first I was unsure. I was used to the life I was living I didn't think change was possible. But once we settled in, I loved it. After a while my dad went away, again, like he always does. By this time I was funding myself but doing some unsavoury things – let's not go into that. I had Sheila and Liam living with me after a while, it was great. For a short time before Liam or Sheila came, I was going through a really tough time, always alone, I couldn't cope with money worries and loneliness. I had just about given up and on May 14th 2012 I made an attempt on my own life. That really changed things and after a while, I started to rebuild myself and become the person you see today.



*Aidan and Shelia in their flat*

In December 2012 my dad came to me explaining we was in more debt then I knew about. He knew at the time I had been saving in case anything like this was to happen so I wouldn't be left on the streets with nothing. He told me we would be out by Christmas, so I immediately lent him £1000. I never got it back. Five months later, we were evicted and I haven't seen him much since. It was obvious to everyone he had not paid the bills and had taken my money and went to start a new life. Evidently without me.

So as soon as May arrived that faced us with more problems. With nowhere to go I went to stay with my mum, that only lasted around a week after constant arguments she tossed my ass back to the curb. So once again we were on the move, taking ourselves to Sheila's mums. But that didn't last long, being short on space we was sharing a room with Sheila's younger sister, I didn't like the situation so once again we moved on to Sheila's older brothers in Ashton. That lasted around four weeks as I couldn't afford to pay in any money. After going to the housing on three occasions and being refused to be housed with Sheila, we were given the details of a solicitor who would help us.



After a brief meeting this solicitor immediately began writing up a letter proclaiming that if we wasn't housed by 6pm that day, we would be taking them to a barrister for neglect, as at the time we was both under the age of 18. That very same day our housing advisor, finally caved and give us temporary accommodation in Steam Mill, Ashton, It finally seemed like our luck was in.



*Aidan and Shelia in their flat*

After staying in Steam Mill for roughly six weeks, the relationship between me and the manager of the establishment broke down. Only recently, we had found out we was going to be young parents. After contacting housing and letting them know about Sheila being pregnant, they moved us on to Mill Bank Court.

Now living at Mill Bank I've never been so happy, Sheila and I have now been together going on a year and things are great, financially stable and we're hoping for the best in the future. After everything I have seen and witnessed from homelessness to feeling so alone, I know there is light at the end of the tunnel, and know to just keep moving forward.



# MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

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**[Scene:** Holly's room, CSV. It's sunny outside, hot and stuffy inside. Everyone's bored and tired and fed up. I sit on a stool by the high table in the centre of the room, next to Tom. Rob, another tutor, sits at the computer in the corner.]

**Me:** You're quite cynical aren't you?

**Tom:** Yeah.

**Me:** There must be something you like.  
What do you like?

**Tom:** Vaginas.

**Me:**

**Rob:** Ask an honest question, get an honest answer.

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**[Scene:** Withy Trees Day Centre. A group of older people, mainly women, sit on green armchairs in a semblance of a circle. I sit in the chair next to Brenda. Behind us, John is fixing a dining chair, hitting the wood hard with a hammer.]

**Brenda:** That sounds like toffee, doesn't it?

**Me:**

**Brenda:** I should have worn my bowler hat.

**Me:** Do you have a bowler hat?

**Brenda:** No, I don't.

---

In an early steering group meeting for *Where The Heart Is*, we end up in a conversation about terminology. Each artist has been reporting back from their experiences within different dementia care settings and we have each stumbled over, apologised about, and failed to come with an alternative for, the term 'service-users'. It smacks of 'us' and 'them' and the



power relations implicit in those terms. It depersonalises. But would coming up with an alternative term simply do the same? What else can we say? 'The people with dementia who use this service'? Is making it longer and clunkier any better?

In the same meeting we are asked to ensure we make a distinction between 'carer': a friend or relative who takes on a caring role for someone, and 'care worker': someone employed to deliver care.

These early meetings are full of terminology. 'Person-centred care', 'enhanced needs', 're-ablement', 'memory services', 'memory boxes', 'dementia journey', 'service user' – language as short-cut, as euphemism – creating a vocabulary with which to organise care, but at the same time, perhaps, covering over the messy diversity of dementia as experienced by the individuals whose lives it affects.

---

**[Scene: Withy Trees Day Centre. I am sat on a green armchair next to Cathleen.]**

**Me:** Cathleen, that's a nice name.  
**Cathleen:** Is it? It just came along, like everything else [waves fingers].

---

Words are a site of struggle for those with dementia, to be searched for; waited for patiently (or not so patiently): 'Hang on, it's coming.' Gerry at Withy Trees used to be active in amateur dramatics. 'I was always so good at learning my lines,' he tells me, 'So this doesn't make sense...' He makes a vague gesture to refer to our conversation, filled with missing words and lost memories.

One morning I ask to go out on one of the buses that pick people up to bring them to Withy Trees Day Centre each morning. Before we set off, I listen to the staff discuss how they're going to get hold of Gerry's daughter's new phone number. His address book, Diane says, is in a state, but it's



their only lead. At Gerry's house, they locate the address book and it is, indeed, in a state – the pages loose and disordered, with little written on them. The staff discuss which letters he might have put his daughter's number under, and then search to find that letter. To no avail. He hovers, anxious, aware that something is missing. 'Do you know your daughter's number, Gerry?' 'No.' He shakes his head, 'I'm not sure I have it.'

Language at CSV is a whole different ball game. The rooms and corridors are thick with expletives. Words here are delivered full blast, on the run. Coaxed into lyrics, yelled in anger, used to shock, to vent anger, to flirt, to assert status, to enrage; or withheld in order to punish or reject. Yet language, in certain contexts, is a barrier too. I offer to help Natalie prepare for her English exam. The comprehension exercise is a recipe for fish cooked in chardonnay. She sits in front of the computer for barely a minute before storming off. A few weeks later, I attend Daniel's spoken English exam. He has to give a presentation about a building project on a Brownfield site in the south of England. He is an articulate, opinionated young man, but he struggles – 'I'm not in the mood, I can't get my head around it' – scrapes a pass.

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**[Scene: Withy Trees Day Centre. I am sitting with Gerry, the remains of breakfast still on the table between us.]**

**Me:** My name's Sarah.

**Gerry:** I don't know a song for Sarah.  
Usually there's a song.

**... [Later]**

**Me:** I like your jumper.

**Gerry:** It was a Christmas present from  
my daughter. It's for protection  
[pause] I'm not sure what  
against [pause] maybe fate.

---



I am a writer. I make my living from words. Language is my comfort zone, my currency, and my site of power. To be able to articulate what you mean and have that read, listened to, taken notice of, is a powerful act. While the young people at CSV and the older people at Withy Trees are different in many ways, there are distinct similarities. Both groups spend time in a 'day centre', organised into groups based on logistical considerations (such as funding policies and other people's timescales), and are encouraged to take part in communal activities. Both groups have a range of agencies involved in various aspects of their lives, agencies which determine to a greater or lesser extent where and how they live. These people have significant internal power – humour and ingenuity, anger and passion and talent – but within society, they are not powerful groups. They (and their families) have to negotiate agencies and structures and policies in order to live the way they want to live in a way that I, currently, do not. Their stories are not often listened to or, crucially, believed. And who are we but the stories we weave together about ourselves? – the things we pick out to keep and share; the things we hide; the things we elaborate on, invent, try out by telling to someone else; the things we say to hide the fact that we can't remember. The things we say to save face, or assert power. Our ability to tell our own story, and have it believed, is crucial to our sense of self.

The young people's stories included in this book started as edited transcripts of conversations. They have been shared with and in some cases edited by the young people – a process I always go through because it is their story, a representation of them, and therefore they should have control over its content and structure. Aidan made the most significant changes to his story – changing it from a series of conversations between himself and Shelia into the single-voiced piece it now is. For me, as 'writer', I felt an aspect of his voice (and Shelia's of course) was lost in this process, and yet another was gained, and I respect his desire to control the way in which he is represented (and Shelia's choice to exclude her voice from the piece).



As someone obsessed with language, I spend perhaps too much time reading the dictionary, and yet the roots of words we use every day can offer valuable insights. The root of the word agent is agere: to act, to do. It is also related to act (as in, to perform), agile, and agony. Talking to young people at CSV who are struggling to negotiate the housing system in order to find somewhere to live, and to staff at Withy Trees trying to ensure that care agencies are giving appropriate home care to their service users, these subsidiary meanings seem fitting. There is a degree of performing going on; a need to be agile – quick on your feet; and far too much agony.

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**[Scene:** Withy Trees Day Centre. I am sitting with George at the table. I keep asking him questions. I am struggling.]

**George:** [very quietly] I'm sorry love.  
Sorry. Sorry.

---

At CSV it is rarely quiet. Music blaring from the practice rooms, or from someone's phone or tablet. People shouting. Laughter. Voices competing for attention. Withy Trees is much more subdued. Often, I have to lean close to someone to catch what they are saying, and people will sit for long periods, saying nothing. Words feel more fragile here, more carefully handled.

Throughout *Where The Heart Is*, each artist has added updates and reflections to the project's Facebook page. Poet, Sarah Hesketh, wrote a very interesting post about silence, observing how noise (TV, music) is often used to fill the silence at Lady Elsie Finney House (a residential care home) in what she sees as an unhelpful way. 'We can see things more clearly when in silence' she suggests.

Sarah's post made me realise that when visiting both Withy Trees and CSV, I felt in some way obliged to engage people in





conversation. Understandable, given my interest in language, but I also realised that I was placing value on my idea of what a meaningful interaction was, and thereby not leaving space for anything else. It was something that felt particularly pronounced at Withy Trees and so I challenged myself to be (more) silent; to sit with people, but not to insist that they speak to me.

Being quiet allowed me to recognise how I and the care-workers sometimes created a conversation between ourselves that on one level included 'service users' but on another level did not. A conversation could look like a group conversation (we were all sitting in a group or at a table) but it was on our terms and was largely between ourselves. This got me thinking about how we try to fit people into a safe, comfortable, understandable narrative – just like the care-workers Sarah observed running to change a CD so that silence was avoided.

Taking a step back and being quieter, not trying so hard, allowed me to have more meandering conversations which didn't fit my pattern or idea of what a conversation should be, but which had their own logic and rhythm. I approached a woman who I'd struggled to interact with in the past and this time just sat with her rather than asked anything of her. We chatted. I still struggled when I couldn't make any sense of what she said to me – I wanted to respond appropriately, but was unsure of how to do so – but I muddled along, as did she, and it felt positive, meaningful, even though I couldn't tell you what we talked about.

I came away from my first few visits to Withy Trees with an overriding sense of fear. How would I cope if my memories and my language slipped away from me? Intellectually, I sense that my memories and my words are what make me me. After many more visits, the fear is still there, but I also understand that there are other, meaningful ways to connect with people; that yes, language is power, but perhaps so too is silence, and so too is simply sitting with someone and letting what happens happen.



WHO  
ASKED  
YOU  
?





*Who Asked You?* is the culmination of one of five *Where The Heart Is* artist residencies, which took place in 2013-2014. *Where The Heart Is* explored the notion of being at home and what that means to people in the care system – young and old alike.

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