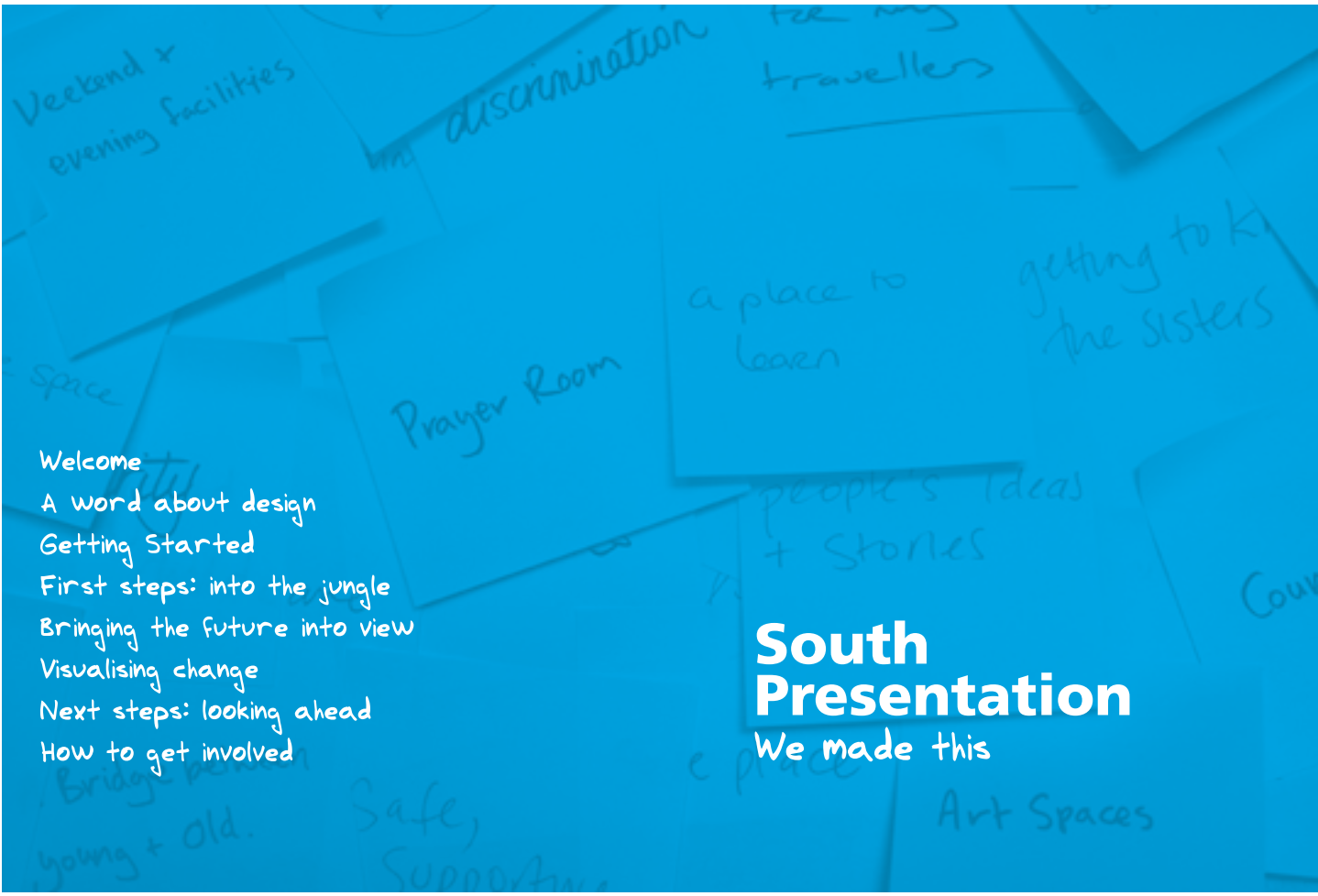




**South
Presentation**

We made this



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South Presentation

We made this

Welcome



We are on the way to creating something special, and we'd like to spread the word.

Who are we?

We are the sisters of the South Presentation convent in Cork (it's known as South Pres and was founded by Nano Nagle in 1775). But we're also Travellers and we're people recently arrived in Cork from other countries. We're recovering addicts and we're teenage mums. We're people from the tougher parts of Cork. We're old people and we're children.

And now we're also designers.

We've set out on a process that's bringing our community to life. There's a lot more to do, but we're so excited about the progress we've made already that we thought it was a good time to share the story so far with you.

By the time you finish reading this, we hope you'll be just as enthusiastic as we are about what's still to come, and where it could lead!

Is this a convent
or is this a place for
the whole community?

It all depends on
how you look at it.



A word about design

"To most people, design is a product or a logo that looks good, works well and comes from a drawing made by a designer.

But there's more to design and designers than that.

Design is a process for finding out what people need and then coming up with ways to make it happen."

Sean McDougall, of Stakeholder Design, who created and facilitated the process for us.

More and more, design is being used by businesses and the public sector to create or improve services, for instance lastminute.com and local car-share schemes. Designers are working on complicated problems, whether it's how to get children to concentrate in school or help people with diabetes have better lives.

The way designers work is changing too. They're not confined to their studios any more but getting up close to the problem they're trying to solve and working directly with the people they're trying to help. As often as not, their job is not to have ideas themselves but to help others have them by creating the right environment for people to express themselves, or just by listening. That's how unexpected discoveries and new connections are made and it's how routes to solving problems are opened up.

That's the kind of design that's happening at South Pres.



Getting started

This report describes the first stage of our work.

The whole process has three stages. Going forward we'll take the ideas we've had in stage one, flesh them out in stage two and then take them on another step so they can work not just in South Pres but possibly on a much bigger scale.

We aim to tell the whole story as we go so that others can learn from the process.

What we've done so far has taken just under a year. During that time, we've met six times and each time we've taken significant steps forward. When we started, no one had done anything like this before. People from the same community, neighbourhood or age group weren't used to talking to each other, let alone to those from outside their own circle. Not only had South Pres lost touch with the community, but **the community had lost touch with itself.**

The first thing we had to do was to break down barriers and build confidence in each other before creating an idea of what we're all working towards.



Mossie

I'm from the Bridge Enterprise group in South Parish.

I jumped at the chance to be involved in this – it's an opportunity to do something with this lovely, peaceful place. Everything is here – all it needs is someone to get it going.

I'm a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. I've spent a long time in prison. My life has taken me to strange places. When I was young I split from society. I drifted outside, stayed outside and thought it was great. Now I see I was stepping away from my spiritual side. I wish I could change it but I can't and I must go on from here.

I'd like to be able to change it for other people, though, like the young people who have come to South Pres. They're the adults of tomorrow and we owe it to ourselves to set them on the right road. We need a place where everyone can come and talk and not feel isolated. Our oasis. People would be queuing up for it because there's such a need out there.

First steps: Into the jungle

We began with a series of meetings in South Pres that showed this was no ordinary 'consultation exercise'.

We weren't going to be talked at, asked for an opinion and sent on our way. We were going to be involved, we were going to be heard and we were going to be making the decisions.

These early sessions got us all relaxed and interested, and used to each other. Thinking of different uses for an orange – one of the exercises Sean gave us - may sound silly, but it got our minds moving. We found 54 uses for an orange!

Then we realised that South Pres could be much more than it is.

In our separate groups, we asked ourselves some big questions:

- What would the world look like if it was working perfectly?
- What will happen if we carry on as we are?
- Why haven't we done anything about it?

First, it helped us work out what was missing in our lives. Then it helped us think about bridging the gap between our lives now and the lives we'd like to lead.

We may all be different, but many of our answers turned out to be the same. Some of them might surprise you. For instance, young people feel threatened – that's why they wear hoodies to make themselves look tougher. All our community groups worried about being 'branded' and about how that stopped others from understanding them. An immigrant can be branded a 'sponger' even though she's got three jobs.



The South Pres organisers first watched sessions being run, then took part and later helped run them using techniques just like this.

These were important steps towards opening up new ground for us to explore.

We feared a world where no one takes responsibility, crime and addiction take over, people feel isolated, lonely and helpless, and where they give up and lose their sense of direction. We could see a time coming when more people fall into the gaps between existing services, neighbourliness breaks down and apathy takes over.

We've seen the problems build up but we don't always know where to start in solving them. **We're told to leave the problem to the experts.**

Rather than doing that, we used some design tools intended to help us to bring problems into the open and analyse them. One of them, borrowed from the business thinker Edward de Bono, is used by IBM to create strategy, but it can work just as well outside multi-million dollar corporations. It involves looking at issues as if you're wearing one of six different hats. We could look at problems using our emotions and intuition (the red hat), our creativity (green), a sense of caution (black) a questioning attitude (white) and so on. Using this technique means seeing a problem from different viewpoints, so for instance as we discussed the question of how to stop children playing truant it became a question of how to make learning more interesting.



Anne

At one time, more than 50 sisters lived and worked at South Pres.

Beginning with Nano Nagle, they offered support to some of the most disadvantaged people in Cork, including education for deaf children, a refuge for elderly people who were homeless, and meeting spaces for local groups. At one point, almost 2000 children came to school in South Pres every day.

Times change. Today, young women who want to help others are more likely to become social workers, teachers or nurses than nuns.

The South Pres schools have closed because of the drop in the city centre population, and the remaining sisters now live close to the site of the first school.

So South Pres is ready to take on a new life.



Mary Margaret

I'm a Traveller and I know what it's like to be tolerated rather than accepted. South Pres could be a great opportunity for our women and our men. Girls often have four or five kids by the time they're 25. They're stuck at home all day, with no education, no social life and very little help from their husbands. It would be good for them to get on a course and put their kids in a crèche, full or part-time, to give them a start. Unfortunately, many Travellers won't do basic training courses because they don't feel accepted on to them. I'd like to open classes for my young girls group, to prepare them for work.

For men, suicide is a big problem. I've been to at least 15 funerals through suicide. I knew quite a few of them - friends and relatives. The problem is that men won't speak their mind and they're too afraid to get counselling about depression, alcohol and drugs. In the last few years it's started happening to Traveller women too. South Pres could be a place for men just to come and find out there's nothing to be ashamed of, and for women to get a life for themselves.

I think I speak for everyone and all cultures when I say that more than anything we want a place where we belong and aren't just tolerated.



Bringing the future into view

Three groups - Getting Together, the Community Association and Nano Nagle Housing - now began to identify services and facilities that would improve life for all of us.

We then explored why they don't yet exist.

Top of the list was a drop-in centre, but for all ages. Voluntary workers featured prominently, as did education and 'a place where potential can be met'.

Also popular was the idea of a health and counselling service, a crèche and 'a place where groups can share'.

A library and a place for social and after-school activities appeared towards the bottom of the list.

Students from Ballyphehane saw a facility that was safe and reliable because it's well run and well used. Its popularity would stem from offering something for everyone – sports activities, spaces for young people and old people, study space and creative space, as well as outdoor space making the most of the magnificent South Pres garden.

The Bridge Enterprise group emphasised the need to nurture talents and gifts not necessarily recognised by the education system. Integration of migrants is vital, as is taking pressure off parents. They said that lack of shared activity for old and young wouldn't matter as long as there was contact between the generations as **'contact cures'**.

A close-up portrait of a woman with short, dark hair, smiling slightly. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The woman's face is the central focus, with her eyes looking directly at the camera. Her hair is styled in a short, layered cut. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with some foliage.

Liz

I live at Nano Nagle Housing. I've been here seven years but I don't know many people here because I've spent most of my life in Ballinlough.

I've enjoyed the meetings at South Pres. It's been interesting hearing people's ideas and stories and it's been good getting to know the sisters and the outsiders. I wouldn't want to change South Pres much, except to make it a safe place for people to come and go, have a coffee and get to know people.

Our apartments are nice but it's hard for families with children because there's nowhere to play. I know one girl with twins and it would be great for people like her to have somewhere to go during the day or even start work and get good childcare for the babies.

I'd also like to see a place for young and old to come together because I was always taught to respect my elders. But it's no good talking unless we do something. We could talk forever, so let's make things happen now.

It was ironic in this light that many migrant workers were prevented from taking a full part in this process precisely because they work long hours and hold several jobs.

New arrivals in Cork were anxious to get to know Irish people and pleased that other groups wanted South Pres to be a place where newcomers and locals could come together. One gap in their lives was weekend and evening facilities, which are desperately needed. Loneliness of families kept apart in accommodation was a significant problem, as were negative feelings from some Irish people towards outsiders.

Traveller women talked about the need for relief from the hardship of bringing up large families. A crèche combined with activities to help them build their self-worth would be very welcome – 'to know there is a place you can come is a great feeling.'

As before, we asked why we hadn't done anything to improve things. Everyone began by agreeing that lack of money was the key reason. But it soon became clear that other factors were actually more important. Like lack of political contacts, or general apathy. We need to feel safe if we are going to address prejudice and build trust across the generations. We all want to make change happen, but are fed up with initiatives starting and then failing and we are disappointed with politicians who we only see once every four years at election time.



Amin

My friend Ali, from Sudan, was walking from town back to the hostel near the airport when some people attacked him. He was only there because he'd missed the last bus, which goes at 7pm. He didn't want to fight and he got away, but they came back in a car and tried to run him down. Although he managed to jump clear, they got out and beat him so badly I could hardly recognise him. Yet, we are all made by God.

We need people like Nano Nagle to fight for people's dignity and rights. And we need Irish people to communicate with us about our feelings. Sometimes we're bored and lonely, and we miss our families. We need a social life and we want to integrate with Irish people. Like a tree, the branches are all different but the root is the same. We hope for status, a job and a good future here. We want to make Ireland our home. We hope South Pres can be a safe place to get to know Irish people, to bring our families, to grow food and just to work.

Visualising change

By now we were thinking about what we could do to address our shared needs. As we developed solutions, we tried to shake off ideas about 'how things are normally done'.

The Ballyphehane students had begun to give life to their ideas by visualising, or prototyping, new uses for South Pres.

It became clear that they didn't just need a place to go – they needed to be able to shape that place with their own ideas.

They decided to use the building itself for their prototyping exercises, constructing cardboard signs that steered people round the building and showed how it could meet the needs uncovered earlier in the process. Would this be a good place for a dance studio? What about here as a place to relax? Could we put a crèche here? People left comments on post-it notes at every location.

The South Parish, Glen, Bridge Enterprise and Nano Nagle Housing groups responded by creating mood boards that illustrated their own ideas and aspirations. Like everyone else, they felt that the prayer room should be kept as it is – a quiet space for young people to 'sort their head' if they were under pressure from home or school.



Everyone could see that there was much more to South Pres than a building, but now we were able to see something we'd never seen before.

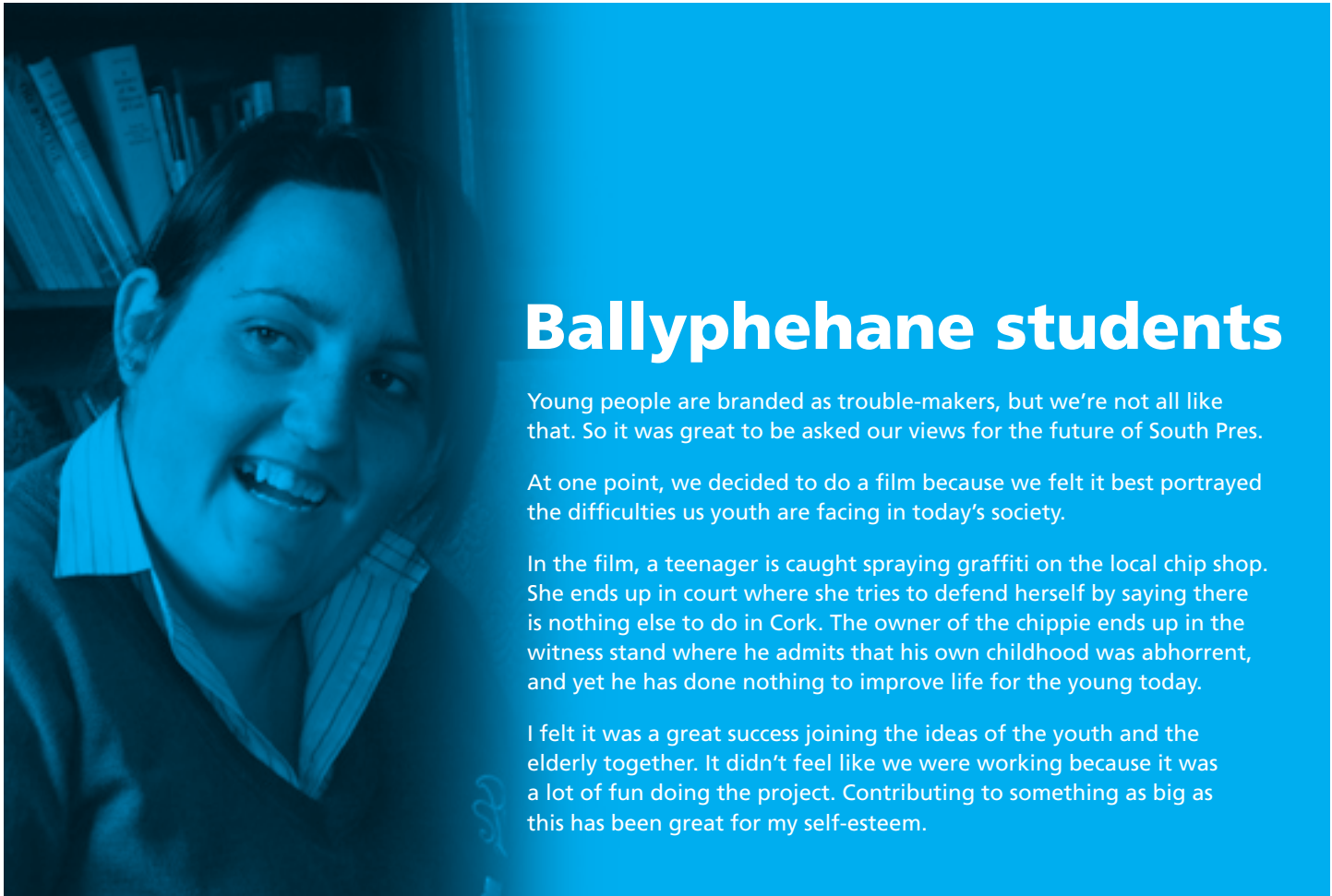
There was a sense of a community coming together and of design making a real impact on how we did things. Some of the comments made at this time really capture the energy and excitement of the community:

"I felt like we planted a seed last night. The seed is growing a little bit – before we know it, it will be a small tree."

"There's nothing said here that we couldn't do if we had the will. And we have the will."

"The sooner we begin to open up the building, the sooner we're meeting people's needs and learning what works so this place can make everyone feel they're in their own home."

Whereas once we had seen South Pres as a convent and thought we were there to redesign the building, we now realised that it was a venue that could be used to bring us together as friends.



Ballyphehane students

Young people are branded as trouble-makers, but we're not all like that. So it was great to be asked our views for the future of South Pres.

At one point, we decided to do a film because we felt it best portrayed the difficulties us youth are facing in today's society.

In the film, a teenager is caught spraying graffiti on the local chip shop. She ends up in court where she tries to defend herself by saying there is nothing else to do in Cork. The owner of the chippie ends up in the witness stand where he admits that his own childhood was abhorrent, and yet he has done nothing to improve life for the young today.

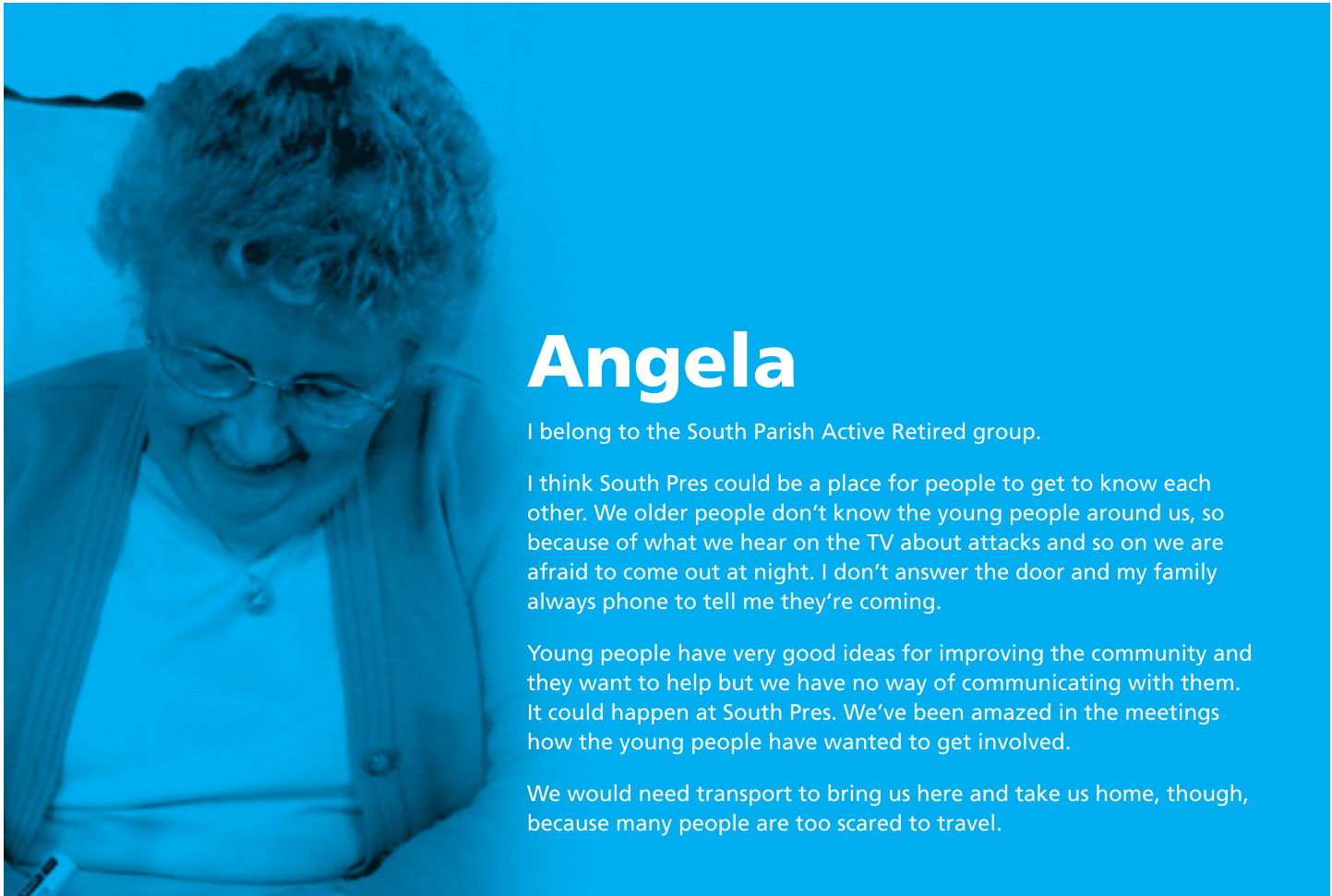
I felt it was a great success joining the ideas of the youth and the elderly together. It didn't feel like we were working because it was a lot of fun doing the project. Contributing to something as big as this has been great for my self-esteem.



The Glen Group

The Presentation sisters are all about standing up for the poor - that goes for the 21st century just as it did in the 18th. So South Pres should become a focus for the whole community, who can all get something out of using its many resources. These are our ideas to kick off the next stage of developing the complex for everyone's benefit.

With proper funding, it can be an after-school club to help the young with their school work, and its classrooms can be used for classes to cut adult illiteracy, with help from City of Cork VEC. There's a chance to help young mums too by opening up the kitchens to cook low-cost meals. The convent car park could be used for a farmers market selling local produce at reasonable prices – and the rent money from stalls could help fund other new developments in the future. We'd like to see the gardens turned into a quiet oasis for older people, with help from Greater Cork's third level horticultural students.



Angela

I belong to the South Parish Active Retired group.

I think South Pres could be a place for people to get to know each other. We older people don't know the young people around us, so because of what we hear on the TV about attacks and so on we are afraid to come out at night. I don't answer the door and my family always phone to tell me they're coming.

Young people have very good ideas for improving the community and they want to help but we have no way of communicating with them. It could happen at South Pres. We've been amazed in the meetings how the young people have wanted to get involved.

We would need transport to bring us here and take us home, though, because many people are too scared to travel.

Next steps: looking ahead

Ideas are starting to take shape. The different groups have a common goal and a shared purpose. That was underlined when we all came together for the session that would mark the end of this first phase of work and set the tone for phase two.

As each group shared their hopes with the rest of us, it became even more clear that we shared the same anxieties and yearnings. The students talked of a bridge between young and old at South Pres. Newcomers to Ireland shocked and moved us with stories of being beaten up on the streets of Cork but looked ahead in hope at what South Pres could be and took inspiration from Nano Nagle's achievements in a hostile environment. South Parish's retired people and Nano Nagle Housing Group residents – both delighted to be invited to take part - wondered if some other groups could continue to make the trip to South Pres and stay involved, but the Glen group said they found South Pres surprisingly easy to get to.

The Traveller community looked to South Pres as a place to get confidentiality, counselling and new skills from cooking to gardening. Just having access to computers could help them pick up their literacy. It is a place, they said, where they could belong **"and not just be tolerated".**

We thought that the process would lead to change.

Now we see that the process is the change.

The Glen group told us about their hopes for South Pres as a bridge for people - especially young people with no voice.

Could this be a place where people could bridge the gap between school and a trade or qualification? Could it also be a place where young men could find a forum and a sense of community to overcome the despair that drives so many to suicide?

The garden at South Pres captured the imagination of Bridge Enterprise as a symbol of its role as an oasis of spirituality and warmth where people can come together. Ex-prisoners valued it as a place to simply be normal.

At one point, one of the sisters said to Sean: "We thought that the process would lead to change. Now we see that the process is the change."

After six meetings, spread over a year, we've come together as a community and identified unmet common needs. Next, we're going to put our ideas to the test, add detail to them and make them as realistic as we can. After that, we hope to make them available to anyone else who stands to benefit from them.

We hope we can count on your help.

Making change **real**

We've discovered that, as a community,
we are capable of identifying and
addressing unmet needs together.

Some of those ideas are shown below.
Would you like to join us, or help make
change real?

Please send us your ideas on how you
could help. Just use the post-it note and
send it back with your contact details.
We will then get back to you so you
can be part of our story.

Please send your suggestions to:

Look here



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A Presentation Ireland project. Booklet produced by Stakeholder Design. Graphic design by Zerofee. Text by Jan Dekker

Weekend +
evening facilities

discrimination

for my
travellers

getting to know
the sisters

a place to
learn

Prayer Room

people's Ideas
+ Stories

unity

child care

Coun

Bridge between
young + old.

Safe,
Supportive

place

Art Spaces