

SEANNA CHIES



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**INSTITUTE
OF DESIGN
INNOVATION**
THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art



**scottish universities
insight institute**
mobilising knowledge for a better Scotland

Principle Investigator:
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The Institute of Design Innovation at the Glasgow School of Art was established in 2012 with a focus on design research. The development and expression of collaborative creativity is the Institute of Design Innovation's (InDI) core research domain and expertise. Design Innovation means both innovation through design and of design. It is a way of engaging a range of expertise that structures collaborative creativity. In order for innovation to be sustainable, it needs to evolve through direct engagement with people, practitioners and policy makers. Its contribution to innovation is twofold: we design new products, systems and services for 'preferable futures' as well as developing the capabilities that are needed to sustain innovation. Our portfolio includes Flourish: a programme of work on personhood and wellbeing seed funded by SU11 towards working with the Scottish Government on Flourishing Scotland and as Creative Partners to the Scottish Leaders Forum; Leapfrog a project funded through the AHRC Connected Communities theme; and AHRC Knowledge Exchange Hub, Design in Action.

Co Investigator:
Dr Deborah Maxwell,

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The Centre for Design Informatics is situated across the schools of Design and Informatics at the University of Edinburgh. Established in 2012 and interdisciplinary in intent, the centre is focused upon investigating the opportunities of designing with data as an academic, pedagogic and entrepreneurial concern. A portfolio of research grants across the disciplines of design and computer science (including EPSRC Digital Economy projects: TOTeM; Connected High Street; Transport Behaviours Network; and Natural Speech Technology) demonstrates that technical depth is complemented by the skills in engaging industry and communities to explore socio-material and immaterial dimensions of the digital economy. In addition, the Design Informatics team has leadership and involvement with a series of socially and economically oriented projects, including a portfolio of projects funded through the AHRC Connected Communities theme, AHRC Knowledge Exchange Hub, and involvement in the Hub of All Things project funded under NEMODE.



SUMMARY

SEANNACHIES

Seannachies (pro: Sen-a-hees)

Traditionally Celtic, Irish and Scottish Highland bards; Seannachies fulfilled an important role as knowledge holders of clans, recounting genealogical histories and upholding birth rights as well as recalling historical deeds of note.

Seannachies is a network of researchers, practitioners and policy makers whose aim is to give voice to communities of elders through creative approaches and storytelling to develop a richer understanding of loneliness, and in doing so consider innovative ways to create and sustain social cohesion. We wish to reposition the perceptions around elder communities by demonstrating the richness of their narratives, life experiences and wisdom to inform policy change in action.

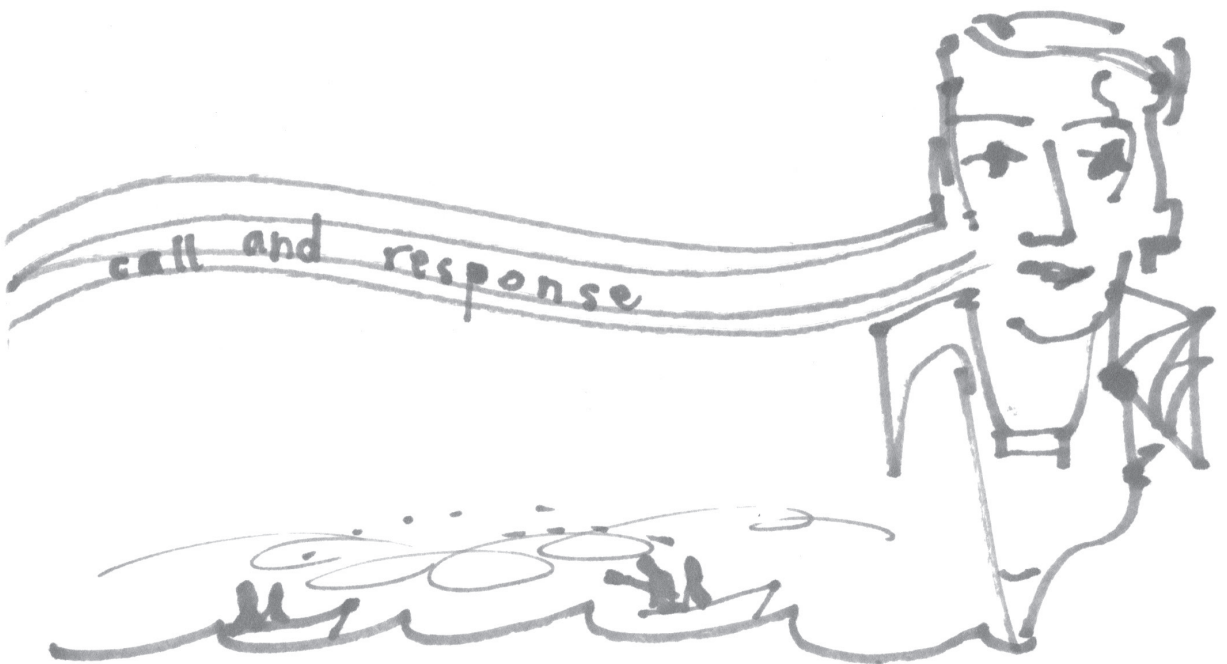
'People in later life who do not see friends and family regularly are almost 50 per cent more likely to die before their time than those who do.'

Age Scotland, 2013

SCOPE OF CONTEXT

From the early days of the Seannachies project we have tried together to understand and frame loneliness as part of the human condition; something we are all susceptible and vulnerable to. Our approach is embedded in creative, contemporary and performative responses to social challenges, which in turn:

- Give voice to communities of elders
- Create individual and collective narratives
- Share therapeutic storytelling and practices



COLLABORATORS

Seannachies have held a series of storytelling events; for both participants and audience, there have been deep lessons in experiencing others' vulnerability – how it can bring forward empathetic responses and feelings of mutual connectedness and support. Key collaborators include design practitioners and researchers, social scientists and storytellers who together aim to influence policy through practice based approaches:

Chris Fremantle, Producer, Gray's School of Art,
The University of Aberdeen.

Dr Pete Seaman, Public Health Manager, Glasgow
Centre for Population Health

Dr Jayne Wallace, Reader, Duncan of Jordanstone
College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

Dr Michael Williams, Professional Storyteller,
Michael Williams Story Coaching

*'After nourishment, shelter
and companionship, stories
are the thing we need most
in the world.'*

Philip Pullman, 2012



EVENT ONE: OPEN MIC – PROJECT CAFE A STORY WITHIN A STORY

The first Storytelling event was held on the evening of the 14th October at The Project Café, Glasgow, hosted by Wendy Woolfson. The sense was that 'A Story within A Story' was beginning to unfold. Although we had reserved the venue for our sole use, there was an overlap between the time the organisers and invited participants began to arrive and the official start of the session that would see the café doors closed to the public. During the overlap, a café customer, David, overheard the conversation between two of the storytellers, Wendy and Michael. David seemed slightly agitated and nervous but intrigued by whatever it was that was being planned.

When the time did come for open mic contributions from the floor, in the second half of the session – after food – David was invited to perform his song. He provided a preamble, contextualising himself, how he hadn't planned to be there that evening and how the warmth and enjoyment of the event so far had helped him find the courage to come forward. Some in the room wondered if he would get to the song but it was beginning to become clear that what was happening was his story was unfolding moment by unfolding moment (Shotter, 2011) .

The story of that moment in time was David had accidentally found a space off the street where he

felt able to contribute, listen and share. Whatever personal problems David brought with him that evening were not solved or cured by the session, but he was able to bring himself to a space where they were not a barrier to his being able to share himself and his talents. For the audience there had been a deep lesson in experiencing another's vulnerability. Of experiencing how it can bring forward empathetic responses and feelings of mutual connectedness and support.

The experience created, briefly, a community from individuals. For audience, storyteller and performer, even if they did not see each other again, they now have a profound shared experience in common.

'Last night a community was created and gave us other stories to tell...'

Storytelling Event Participant, 2014

EVENT TWO: WORKSHOP SUII POLICY MAKING IN ACTION

A full day's workshop was held the following day the 15th October at SUII, Andrew Lyon – Director Scotland at International Futures Forum – facilitated the day with: 'enough structure to reveal life, but not too much to kill it dead'. Professor Carol Tannahill, Chief Social Policy Adviser to the Scottish Government presented the scope of the challenge to provide an overview and context setting for social isolation and loneliness. (Highlights from her presentation are included in Appendix 01), questions were then posed around the key themes of:

- How loneliness is being recognised by policy makers
- How people explain their experience of loneliness?
- How it is not an 'us and them' scenario; the professionals versus the lonely. We are all at risk and vulnerable to loneliness, isolation and its consequences.

- Who has the responsibility to make sure people aren't lonely?
- Given we cannot legislate against it, what can we advise policy makers?

Carol responded that working in the Scottish Government for the last six months there is a real recognition that the long standing problems of Scotland will not be addressed through policy papers – post referendum Scotland wants to engage. It is a set of issues and challenges that don't lend themselves exclusively to data.

People will look for examples of approaches elsewhere in the world; personal stories are a really rich asset. Policy makers are interested in how stories can inform policy.



STORIES ABOVE THE STATS

There appears to be an appetite at the moment for blended approaches to inform policy, the time is right for developing a creative and cohesive narrative that situates the stories above the statistics: for example allows a conversation around the upstream causes of loneliness and isolation, of how our actions and understandings of the economy, ageing, life-course, family and other factors can structure new forms of isolation and new experiences of loneliness.

These are complex issues, there is not 'one solution', it is about multiple small interventions that are highly interactive in small and beautiful ways that together can aggregate towards real change. It is also about exploring and restating our values and maintaining sight of what is important to us so it is not lost as unforeseen consequences of progress.

THE POWER OF LISTENING

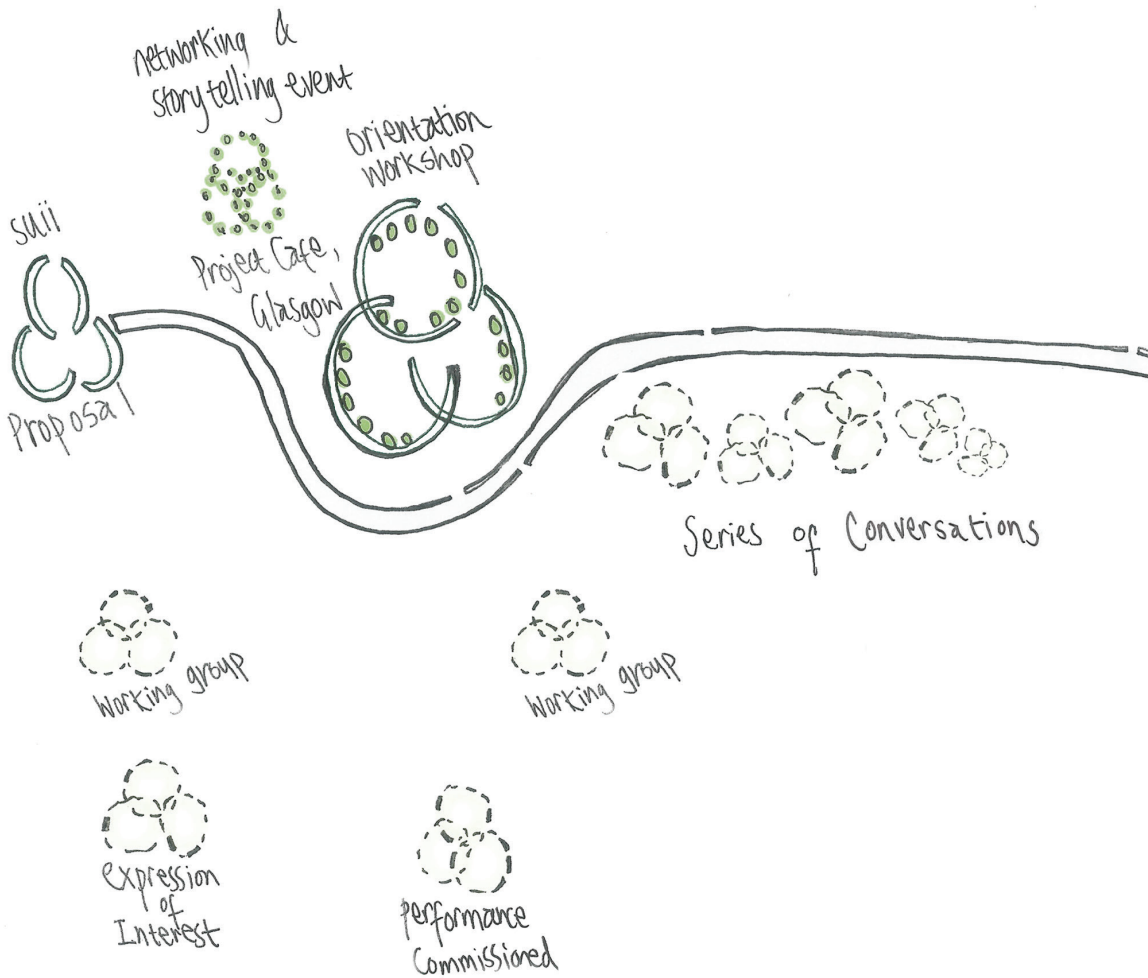
Listening to a story told to you and one read to you are two completely different experiences. You have to be there to feel it; community, sharing connections and being actively engaged. Michael Williams provided stimulation on the textures of loneliness and the transformational potential of a story and in particular the power of empathetic listening. It was noted that story listeners are important; they don't fit into your own agenda and listen unconditionally.

We need to practice empathetic listening, just listen for the sake of listening, and learn to switch off your brain with the intent to listen. When we are listening we are rehearsing what we are going to say in reply. The power of story is that it enhances empathetic understanding and responses, it is a form of embodied knowing that is missing from statistics and results of evaluation on what 'works'.

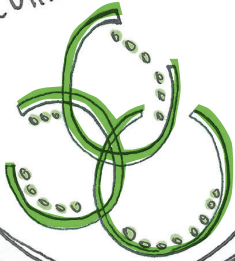


Seannachies

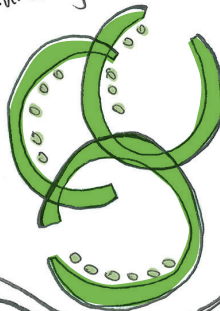
ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION THROUGH STORYTELLING



Collider Event



BROTH
Performance Event
Scottish Storytelling Centre,
Edinburgh



Final session
& Reflections



Working group



EVENT THREE: SEANNACHIES COLLIDER

The Seannachies Collider event brought together stakeholders from the Seannachies network, along with masters students and researchers from the Centre for Design Informatics at Edinburgh College of Art to participate in a workshop framed by three lightning talks from Professor Mike Wilson (Loughborough University), Anna Goulding (Newcastle University) and Reverend Russell McLarty (Church of Scotland Minister). The interactive half-day workshop, allowed participants to consider the role of storytelling and social isolation within the context of data and the digital world, drawing on conversations and reflections from the first Seannachies workshop to think through near future ways of addressing social isolation.

As part of the Centre for Design Informatics programme, interactive workshops, called Colliders provide a framework and creative resource from design master students facilitated by Professor Jon Oberlander.

CONTENT

The session began with an introduction by Jon, explaining the collider concept, where ideas are accelerated from more than one area by bringing them together. The Collider was an opportunity to move beyond discussions, towards actually trying out what might or might not work. Deborah provided background to the Seannachies collider and set the aim of the event on developing new ideas around storytelling in the context of digital

media, social isolation and exclusion.

Mike Wilson (via video conference) shared his thoughts on storytelling as much more than a mode of communication, rather as an alternative knowledge system, where storytelling can codify or translate experiential knowledge to help us deal with multiple complexities. Stories can provide a different way of knowing and can increase access to debates on equal footing. In particular he shared a digital story by Heather, a farmer, who told her story of the changing weather patterns on her farm. This story has been used a lot in community groups as part of a project on climate change, and was the story that resonated most with the groups. In terms of authority, it carried authenticity and believability; Heather's voice is not normally the voice that is heard in climate change, not normally an 'expert' voice yet has a different kind of authority and expertise.

Russell McLarty spoke about his community work in Glasgow on the Chance to Thrive project, and how human meeting is critical, 'eye to eye, heart to heart, mind to mind'. He highlighted the importance of humour in building and bonding of groups; the building of a story. Hospitality and dancing is all part of the story! The projects in Glasgow through building up positive stories developed new enterprises and local empowerment, with community members setting up social enterprises, such as, using local radio to connect and empower disenfranchised young adults. The Chance to Thrive provided a dreaming and scheming space for a local community



to think what they want to happen, a chance to write their own new stories for the future.

Anna Goulding presented her research at Newcastle University, working with people with dementia and visual artists. She described how art was their starting point – high quality artist led interventions – not simply the often used reminiscence work. The research took a sensory approach, using textures such as feathers to respond to artworks through simple and gentle sessions. This approach, for instance, the act of opening and closing boxes, was a slow reflective practice. As researchers, they learnt lessons on how to navigate behaviours, and to work with humour. Following these positioning talks, collider participants were encouraged to break into small groups to consider the prompt:

‘What tools can we design to offer alternative ways to form communities, bridge barriers, share stories, and ultimately begin to address social isolation?’

Each group focused on one of the following modalities (drawn at random) to respond to the question:

- Audio, e.g. Internet radio, podcasts, music
- GPS and data logging, e.g. Fitbit, Nike Fuel
- Social media, e.g. Facebook, Instagram
- Sensors, e.g. Estimote Beacons, Nest, Accelerometers, Arduino

- Video, e.g. Skype, YouTube, iPlayer, Vine
- Mobile, e.g. iPad, feature phones, smartphones, pico projectors
- SMS, i.e. Using small character sets/limited input (e.g. 140 character Tweet)
- Tactile/haptic tech, e.g. Robots, smart fabrics.

At the end of the afternoon each group presented back their ideas. Discussion sessions raised personal experiences of working in these complex areas and afforded a genuine set of reflective exchanges between design students and stakeholders, resulting in some intriguing new ideas. These included a digital tea-made that could connect isolated tea makers across space; an eye-gazing app that connected cameras to connect emotionally with strangers; and iPot connect plant pot that responded to the environment and provided social opportunities for owners; and a skills swapping recycling scalable social enterprise concept.

Each presentation generated further discussion and highlighted some of the very real challenges in working with and tackling social isolation. Student perspectives and images are available online at:

<http://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/school-of-design/news-events/stories-from-the-seannachies-collider>



EVENT FOUR: SCOTTISH STORYTELLING CENTRE BROTH

Broth was a performance to give voice to older people, and to raise awareness of loneliness and social isolation in our communities. Created and performed by artist Donna Rutherford, Broth is an honest exploration of the human condition told through the experience of elders in 21st century Scotland. Drawing on the folk tale Stone Soup, Broth explores the ritual of making soup and the revelations that trace changes in people's lives, families and wider communities. Connecting the key themes of time, identity and memory, Broth is a contemporary reflection on what it means to age and moreover a call to action for what it is to care in the present-day.

INFORMING POLICY

'What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.'
Kurt Vonnegut (1974)

The ageing of our population has made older people and later life a major concern of policy. There is always a danger that concern can turn into a problem to be fixed, producing unequal pairings of the helper and the helped, the powerful and the powerless, the agents of change and the passive recipients.

During the making of Broth it was impossible to maintain such categories. There was not sympathy, but identification, a shift from them to we. This helps us reflect on the passage of time, what we do with the time we have and what ultimately matters. We

received insight and expertise as the voices blurred the boundaries of the problem and problem solving; of who can help who. In describing challenges of old age, described are challenges of contemporary living. In how to be an informal carer, that the simple and easy things matter most, 'the friendship part' and that we all 'need to be needed.'

In an era where youth is elevated, we were struck by people whose youth has never left them although their bodies age, memories of time spent with others become their 'pillars of survival' as physical challenge and short term memory loss set in. The narrowing of their social world from physical deterioration raises questions for anyone who is unable to balance what they really value with the demands made from elsewhere. Although life after retirement is a major concern in politics and policy, Broth reminds you how rarely older people's voices are heard as individuals with experience that has a vital role in reshaping our present.

Increases in life expectancy are considered one of the major achievements of our age yet one woman tells us she never thought she would be old. This points to a tension between growing old physically and growing old in the imagination. The perspectives in the Seannachies project and the Broth performance provide material to begin a re-imagining of all our later years and of adding quality to the quantity of years still to be lived.

'[...] to be treated as a person... rather than an old person' Liz – Broth Performance, 2015

EVENT FIVE: THE LIGHTHOUSE SEANNACHIES STORY

POSITIVES:

A full day workshop took place on Thursday 25th June at the Lighthouse, Glasgow, facilitated by Dr Michael Williams and attended by Lynn-Sayers McHattie, Pete Seaman and Donna Rutherford. The purpose was to capture Seannachies story so far, including:

- to review and revise, if necessary, our definition/purpose/vision of Seannachies network
 - to share our experiences of the Seannachies project thus far and transform these into meaningful stories; (e.g. Broth; workshops; meetings)
 - to distill from our stories a 'larger picture' or over-arching story that expresses the essence of what the Seannachies experience has been about and importantly, where it's going next
 - to explore what further steps will we take individually and as a group
 - to discern how we might celebrate and share this story with the wider public/other organisations/Scottish Government/colleagues?
 - What learnings can we share and with whom might we collaborate and/or support in the future?
- Each member of the group reflected on and shared his or her personal experience of being in the network – the positives and the challenges. These are summarised as follows:

- opportunity to work with Government and influence policy and thinking
- create a space where creative practice can happen
- effective use of story and storytelling as a powerful method of undertaking and reporting research on social policy
- revealed insights into social isolation and loneliness
- potential in arts- and performance-based research and reporting of social issues
- input into design services
- highlighted different modes of communication to create public engagement
- opportunities for collaboration with creative artists
- creation of a network of expertise
- demonstration of storytelling as a social movement – therapeutic, health and wellbeing, education, arts & performance
- Seannachies network offers opportunities for personal and professional development; and community development
- positive cooperation between third sector, academic, creative, social policy and Government bodies

CHALLENGES:

- At times the work could be emotionally challenging
- Sometimes challenging to know who was doing what (the bigger picture)
- Broth needs to be framed in a more effective way to communicate Seannachies group mission and vision; further editing for use in social and other media
- To clarify the insights we are producing and look at how we can share them – what, where, how and with whom?
- Exploring various modes of storytelling
- Reflecting on how we can best support collaborating artists in their work for us (e.g. support for continued Broth performances in other communities)
- Budgetary issues – needs to be sustainable
- Desire for more input from social policy and Government representatives – how do we nourish and develop these relationships?
- How to achieve original goal of creating a wider network of expertise
- Recognition that population is ageing; how to engage community in our work? How to meet community needs?
- Improving lines of communication so everyone knows who everyone else is and what their roles are

IDEAS AND ACTIONS FOR THE FUTURE:

Given the positives and challenges, the group felt there was a strong need to continue to develop and that much could be achieved in the future. Time was spent discussing ideas and actions for the future development of Seannachies. These are outlined below.

- identify future funding to enable seasonal seminars for the network and ensure sustainability of project
- support the touring of Broth (possibly seeking support from Creative Scotland). Donna reported that three shows are planned for October with others to follow
- keep focused on working with loneliness and social isolation as a context
- identify a peer-reviewed journal for publication of our research
- possibly identify a PhD student interested in carrying out research
- seek future collaboration with community initiatives like Project Cafe to support the sharing of stories
- connect with communities to create space and time for isolated and lonely people to share stories
- explore connections between food, story and community wellbeing, particularly developments in food activism, social rituals, food preservation and distribution, nourishment and wellbeing (e.g. rise of cafés in communities; food hubs and co-ops; food banks; dumpster diving; guerrilla agriculture)
- continue to develop our partnerships with funders and supporting bodies (e.g. SUJ, AHRC)



REFLECTIONS

The Seannachies network has generated insights, positive ideas and reflections, as well as highlighting a number of challenges to be addressed. Importantly, the network have identified and put forward specific actions and ideas for future development. In the relatively short time that the Seannachies group has been operating, it has demonstrated that creative practices and storytelling — in a variety of forms — are powerful method of engaging community and promoting social inclusion. The Seannachies network has successfully brought together Government officials, social policy advisers, academics, designers, creative artists, storytellers and members of the community and argues for a continued collaborative and creative approach to dealing with the challenges of isolation and loneliness amongst our elderly population.

Finally, it is crucial that the Seannachies ‘story’ continue to be shared and celebrated. As it becomes better known, it will attract a wider network of support thus deepening its impact on community wellbeing for socio-cultural benefit.



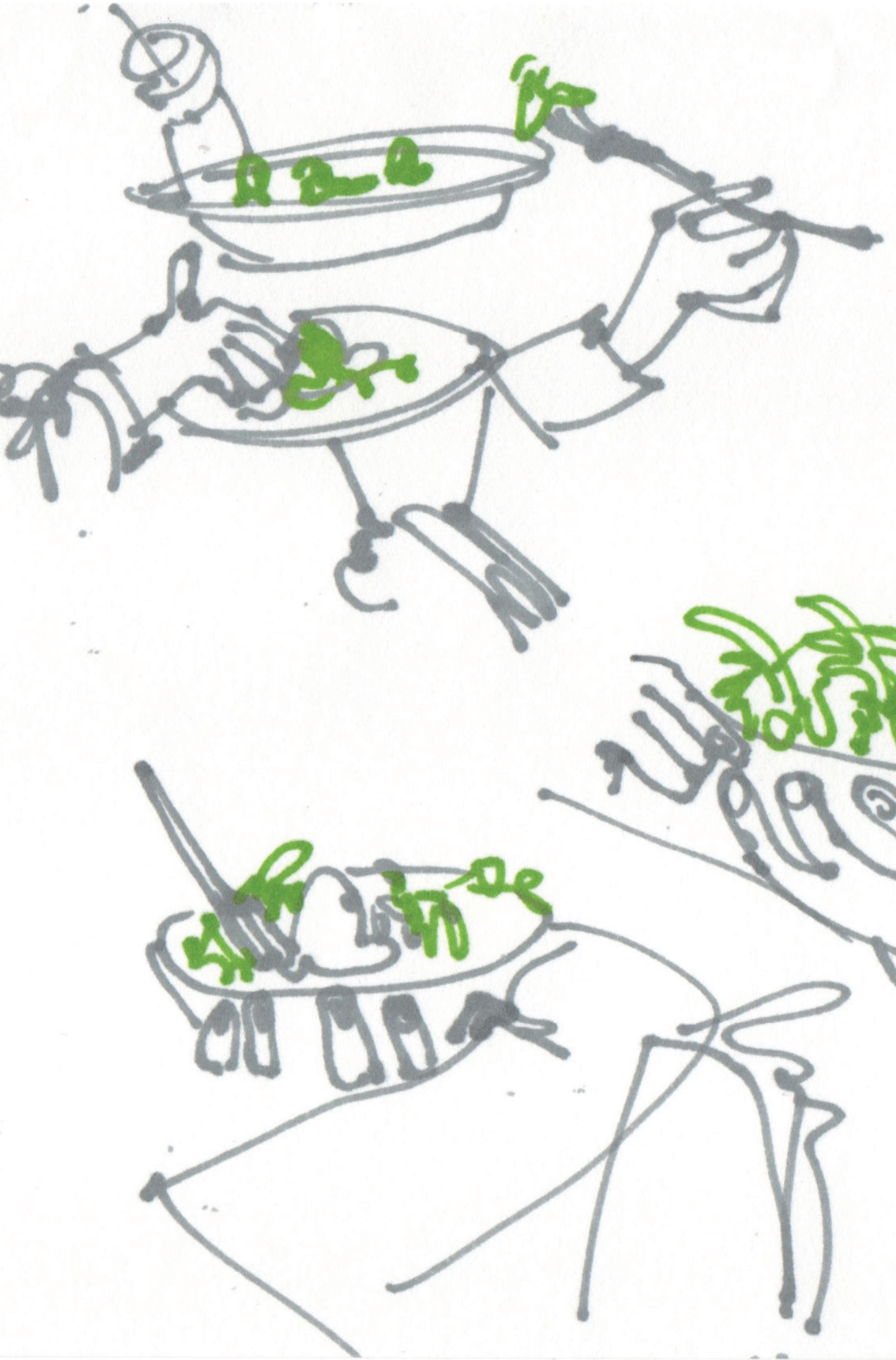
the story of the skeleton lady

its true

APPENDIX 01:

Excerpts from Prof. Carol Tannahill

- Causes of Loneliness
- Ageing, illness
- Death and divorce
- Social Media
- Long commuting times
- Abuse, rejection from others
- Being unable to fit in
- Changing households and geography
- More transient communities
- A wider culture of individualism and materialism
- Health problems associated with loneliness
- Stress, depression, anxiety
- Sleep deprivation
- Negative effects on immunity
- Sleep deprivation
- Negative effects on immunity
- Cardiovascular problems, raised blood pressure
- Health damaging behaviours (Overeating, alcohol, less activity)
- Within Glasgow, from Go Well Communities Research
 - 17% men; 15% women frequently lonely
 - 60% men and women rarely/never lonely
 - People in work, training, employment less lonely
 - Loneliness most common among: middle aged people; those with no qualifications; people living alone; people with long term health conditions
 - Other factors associated with higher feelings of loneliness
- Infrequent contact with family or neighbours
- Rarely talking to people in the neighbourhood
- Lack of sources of emotional or practical support
- Perception of weak community collective efficacy
- Feeling unsafe walking alone at night-time
- Perception of more anti-social behaviour in area
- Factors associated with lower feelings of loneliness
- Knowing more people in the neighbourhood to talk to
- Use of local amenities
- Neighbourhood physical environment rated as higher quality
- NB Taking part in local clubs/associations and walking frequently in the neighbourhood were not associated with loneliness
- More generally in the UK
- A survey from the Mental Health foundation suggests that loneliness is more prevalent among the young than those past retirement age
- It found that nearly 60% of these aged between 18 and 34 spoke of feeling lonely or often or sometimes, compared with 35% of those aged over 55.
- Another survey by ICM research found that 41% of pre-adolescents (between 6 and 13 felt lonely.
- A complex problem – but simple acts count



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