

ICON

Stories from the Old Fire Station

Collected after the ICON
exhibition, 2019/20



ICON

Introduction

These are the stories of 11 people who participated in ICON – a collaborative project between Arts at the Old Fire Station (AOFS) and Crisis Skylight Oxford. The project brought together Crisis members - people with experience of homelessness - to work in collaboration with internationally renowned photographer Rory Carnegie to recreate and exhibit a series of iconic British photographs.

To help us understand the impact of ICON for those that took part we used storytelling – an evaluation approach based on the Most Significant Change technique which AOFS began using with the support of consultants Anne Pirie and Liz Firth in 2017.

The ICON stories were gathered from Crisis members, staff and artists between October and December 2019 by a team of trained story collectors. By telling their stories participants had the chance to reflect on what has changed for them through taking part in ICON.

How did it affect their life? Why was it important to them?

The stories were recorded, transcribed and then edited down to 2 pages each - aiming to keep the teller's 'voice' (using their own words) and reflect the teller's insights into impact and its significance for them. This document presents the stories we collected.

A full explanation of the methodology, the project and what we learned can be found in the ICON report. [Click here to read it.](#)

With thanks to:

The eleven story tellers

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I FELT A LITTLE BIT TALLER

Even years after I will always remember and take away with me that feeling, the sense of accomplishment. I belong, I have a place here, I have much to contribute. You did that. You.

I used to be quite shy, a bit reticent to kind of take a lead in anything. I guess some people might say I have imposter syndrome. I used to feel that, any minute now they're going to find out who you really are, and then all of sudden all of my achievements would just go out the window, and I'm left like, why do I do this to myself? It's easy to end up going down a route which is not conducive to self-esteem and I certainly was walking down that road until certain things helped to say, 'don't go down that road. No, no, no, no, no, this one's much better'. I was just very lucky, very fortunate, to have this experience in this wonderful, wonderful, wonderful place.

I felt really privileged to be approached to do any of the photos, especially the Spice Girls because they are so iconic. I think it was fairly obvious my part would be that of Scary Spice because I have kind of similar hair and stuff, so I just said 'yes' immediately. Getting ready it really felt like we were preparing for our live debut. We had girly time together – the dressing, the make-up, the singing – 'I tell you what I want, what I really, really want!'. Lucy [Crisis Arts Tutor] did my make-up. When she said 'I think you're finished' I went to look in the mirror and I was like, 'WOW, oh my God, look at me! Oh my God!'. And that little flame that was almost extinguished just went POW!

If I was having a kind of momentary crisis, like 'I can't, I can't, I can't do this', I just used to think, you can trust Rowan [Crisis Arts Co-ordinator] and Jodie [Crisis Arts Tutor] and all the others. If I hadn't had that trust and confidence in them I might have been very anxious about, you know, what if I get it wrong? But they were like, 'you've got it. I've got you'. So I don't need to worry about those kind of old fears or, you know, doubts about my ability to make it a success, because I just trust that literally everything that they come up with has been really well thought through and really well put together so that everyone feels, 'yeah, that's fine with me'.

I don't know about the others, but this is probably one of the first times someone's done a shoot of me. Yes you can go and get your picture taken, you know, family portrait sort of thing, but this was a big thing and you know Rory [Lead Artist] was this big sort of like photographer who obviously is very experienced and knows how to get the best out of the people. It was very exciting, very, very. We just did as many retakes as possible and just trusted that the result would be incredible, and it was, it was incredible.

I felt very privileged to do this project and it really did give me a bit of a confidence boost, you know? I felt valued, I felt valued to help create this. Even years after I will always remember and take away with me that feeling, the sense of accomplishment - I belong, I have a place here, I have much to contribute, yeah you did that, you. I felt a little bit taller, even though I'm not, but I felt a little bit taller, I felt a very strong sense of pride.

Spice Girls are iconic and they represent a cross section of people. I think they help to send the message of unity. No matter what background or colour you are everyone has an important

part to play. In the photo I felt that I wanted to portray that even though obviously we all have different stories and different journeys with Crisis, we're here together. It didn't matter what your circumstances were, you still had a sense of value and pride and a sense of, you know, still wanting to look for the good things and take something positive. Being around and being involved with other members helps you in some way and by giving away you kind of get it back in some sense.

I took a lot from the girl power movement, and the sense of empowerment it gave me when I first heard about the Spice Girls. They were such strong, positive female role models, which I feel that there's just not enough of around. You could just sense that all five of us, we were imbued with that. You know the awful saying 'fake it till you make it'? So we were faking it, but you know a little bit we made, we made it even if it was just for a project. There was real camaraderie and encouragement towards each other. It was very empowering and I felt I got some of that power from us all being together as girls. When I think about it it fills me with a sense of accomplishment. To picture something is really nice, but to feel it is another matter.

I've got a daughter, she's an architect. I know I should lead by example and I should stop this meek 'oh well, never mind' - I don't want her to think like that, feel like that. And so my every endeavour is to help nurture those things that were just slightly neglected in me and want her to really be empowered. Whether it's as a young black woman or whether it's as a woman entering a very male dominated environment. I'm just very aware that we have an opportunity to actually...what's the word? I don't want to say be rule breakers, but you know, be rebellious ones, if you know what I mean. Cause it takes some brave soul to just say 'I don't buy that bullshit anymore'.

They're going to turn ICON into calendars, merchandise and stuff. So those things are going to be there in print for anyone to see. Somewhere they'll be always this kind of record of everyone's involvement in making that happen. And it not only looks fabulous, it make us all look really...I don't know, like in some of the pictures, especially The Bullingdon Club, you know, it just kind of elevates us so we are actually standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before us and that is a really lovely feeling. I wouldn't have been able to have jumped on those big shoulders hadn't someone given me a little bit of a leg up - 'there you go, get on there. Get up there and do your thing and don't let anyone tell you otherwise'.

I've often said that while having four walls does help to make you feel secure, when you lose that internal home, of belonging and self, then that's when you're in real danger of disappearing down the plug hole. So whether you have four walls or not, coming to Crisis and doing things like this project helps to maintain that internal home. You might be going through a lot of crisis in the external world, homelessness and whatever, but you still have that sense that you are able to carry on pushing, moving forward. It's as if projects like this are just like a big plug - 'you're not going anywhere, you're staying right here and, what's more, I think you'll like it'. And they were right, they were absolutely right.

JUST GOING FOR IT

I'll take away the fact that you can make something happen even if you're not that confident that it's going to work...It's just going for it, really.

As the Crisis photography tutor, the project started with Rory [Lead Artist] coming into my class on a Thursday. He was only supposed to come into one class to meet me and meet the members and he actually started coming in every week, and coming out and about with us and, you know, between us we worked really well together. Quite quickly I saw him build a rapport with the members and realised that he was really down to earth and they responded to him really well. He gave us loads of time in the first term, before we'd even started ICON.

Once we were on site, basically, I was there as a support to the members, really. Just making sure that their needs were met and that they felt comfortable doing what they were doing. So I said that I was there in a supportive role, but I felt like members were really supportive to other members as well. The project broke down a lot of barriers, you know with everyone's different roles, really. Some people were more confident than others in their roles, you know, and I think that everyone just kind of pitched in - all of us just supported each other.

Everyone in it, they say it was a collaboration - and it really was. Everybody got stuck in with everything, you know. It was all hands-on deck, we had to do a bit of makeup, a bit of lighting, everyone did a little bit of everything, it felt really inclusive.

There was a breakdown of hierarchy - but then I think when I first met Rory I kind of felt that already, that actually he wasn't going to be too overbearing and bossy, that he did take everyone's views on board and tried to listen to everybody. That it was much more inclusive and we all felt that we had a significant input into each picture.

I know that in my art class - as soon as I say we're doing portraits, people shudder and they don't want to be in front of the camera. But actually, everyone (bar one person, who took the behind-the-scenes photos) managed to be in a photo, everyone pushed on through. They swapped gender roles, you know, put on prickly dresses that they didn't want to put on and faced bright lights that they didn't want to face or got in tanks that were really difficult to get into and they were scared of heights and went up in a cherry-picker - everyone actually pushed on through their fears.

And actually, I hate - I HATE - being in front of the camera. So I could understand the members' fears about being in front. We were all nervous, we were all put in the same situation at different times, you know, whether that was behind the camera or in front of the camera. We all swapped roles, we all kind of felt each other's fears around it and insecurities and paranoia and so that was going out of my comfort zone as well.

I didn't sleep, every night before a shoot, every single night, worried that nobody is going to turn up or that something's going to happen to somebody on shoot; you never know what's going

to happen, it's that anticipation, the anxiety before a shoot, I think that will always be there. And having worries about what the picture's going to look like – you know with the Miner's Supper, the Bill Brandt one? We shot that in the art room in Crisis. You know, we literally put the wallpaper up with double-sided sticky tape and shoved an art table and just had a few props and threw some clothes everywhere – I didn't see how it was going to work. And that was the most transformative, I think that when you looked at that on the screen you were like, 'wow, we are in the same room that that photo was actually taken in'. That one is actually my favourite. I think it's beautiful, it's exquisite. It looks better than the original.

So yeah, I'll take away the fact that you can make something happen even if you're not that confident that it's going to work. You've got to try it anyway and see what it's going to look like, really. I think it's normal to have fears. It's normal. Well, I guess it's just going for it, really.

And being in the Bullingdon Club photo - I think I gained a bit of confidence by then actually. I stood there quite proud and I was proud of everyone and everyone looked great suited and booted and, yeah so actually that one, I think that we'd all kind of found our feet by then. I think it shows in the picture, we all are stood there quite arrogant, quite proud, you know we're quite confident in that picture.

The hardest part of the project was the opening night when we did the Q&A and we all had to stand up in front of an audience and talk through a microphone and you know, get thrown questions from the audience. And, really, I felt like a fish out of water there. But again, once I'd done it I was absolutely buzzing. And I have to say that I've got a bit of confidence from it.

And professionally, you know, knowing that I can work with another professional, knowing that I can work within other teams and with the OFS, kind of bridging Crisis and the arts, you know, that's really good experience. I mean, I've never worked with OFS before. But we had loads of meetings beforehand so that I got to meet Megan [Project Manager] and Sarah [Visual Arts Programme Manager] and some of the other people from the arts. Just to clarify who's doing what in what role and how that's going to work. So I felt quite comfortable working with them. That was great, and a good experience. Yeah, it felt great. And fun. And I've formed good relationships with Megan and Sarah, and you know this is going to continue as well because we're doing other work together.

And in my photography class as well I think I've learned some new skills from Rory and the team about what to do in my class with members now. I think, you know, we will revisit doing portraits and I think that we can all do it a little bit more confidently and support other people, new people to the class, to actually push on through and do it.

I'm excited to see the exhibition tour. I'm excited for it to go to Bristol. My stepson didn't get a chance to come and see it in Oxford, but he's in Bristol a lot so I've already arranged to show him around. He's gone through the book with me and I've shown him all the behind-the-scenes pictures already, you know.

I feel really proud. When I show my friends and family, I always say, 'this is a project that I've got involved in'. And actually, this seems bigger than any other project I've done, and I was more proud of this and I was more involved in this - and felt I had more input in this. This is, yeah, probably the coolest thing I've done.

IT SENDS YOU INTO A MUCH BETTER PLACE

Getting that identity and self confidence back and feeling that your contribution is welcome – I think that’s a really important thing. I think that’s what’s changed for me - feeling like I’m getting back the qualities I had before.

I initially came to Crisis for a shower and a shave. I was then signed up as a member and allocated a progression coach for advice on how to get out of homelessness. That was the Crisis support structure, and then I was also made aware of the wonderful programme of classes that the building facilitates and, being someone who’s more on the creative spectrum, a lot of the creative classes – creative writing, acting, music and art – they appealed to me. Suddenly I found my week going from being very empty to having quite a full calendar, you know, at least two or three things every day.

I’d been meaning to go to photography, it was constantly in the background as something else that I felt I could get interested in. I’d finally organised myself so that I could go along and it happened to be the start of the ICON project. It immediately sounded like something I’d want to be involved in. It just kind of hits all those creative buttons for me – it’s collaborative, you can be in front of a camera or not, and it’s about actually producing work that we’re really proud of, that has artistic merit.

I was involved in the decision-making right through from the first shoot, Abbey Road, and then pretty much every shoot after that. I was in front of the camera, behind the camera, involved in sourcing costumes, and having a look at composition. I learnt a lot. I wouldn’t say I could start my own photography practice just yet, but I must admit it’s something I would like to pursue in the future.

For the first few shoots you’re obviously very focused on ‘right I’ve got my costume on and I’m going to have to get this’ and yes it’s exciting, but you’ve also got that kind of stress, not that anyone’s giving you stress, but you still have this level of stress. But the joy and relief when it’s over, and the sense of achievement was such a great buzz. They were also a lot of fun. On a simple level, it just made the day more pleasant, gives you something to look forward to, which is really important. There was a level of excitement that was involved, whether you were in costume or not, and being part of the gang and focussing together on getting it right.

I’ve worked on collaborative projects before, but what I really found I got from this was working with staff, volunteers and Crisis members all on a level, it felt egalitarian. On every single one, whether I was involved in the finished article or not or whether I was supporting, you just got this sense that everyone was working together, staff and members alike, and it was just a joy.

I’m lucky to have been in so many of the photographs, but I also enjoyed actually being able to step back a bit for certain things. What’s good about ICON is that you can be as involved in it as you want. I loved the sense of change that gave. You can be all over it, you can just sit back and contribute ideas, but you still get just as much out of it – you’re still contributing.

Being homeless knocks you back, as most people would expect, but I for one couldn't have foreseen how much it takes out of you. All your self-confidence goes, you forget skill-sets that you have, and the longer you're in that situation you become more of a shadow of yourself, you find yourself as this helpless thing that doesn't know what to do. As a 56-year-old man who's been in relationships, been in work and had all the normal stresses and strains - family and all that stuff - suddenly you find yourself quite out at sea, and it's an alien place to be.

It can be quite insidious, and things can affect me now that might not have affected me before - life isn't as straight forward as it used to be. Certainly ICON and with other projects, they act as a bit of a shot in the arm, and make you realise that you're not so bad, that things can get better. If you looked at me a year ago, or months ago even - certainly I don't think I'd have felt as comfortable supporting other members, or even putting my view forward, or having an idea. Getting that identity and self-confidence back and feeling that your contribution is welcome - I think that's a really important thing. I think that's what's changed for me - feeling like I'm getting back the qualities I had before.

Being involved in a project like this, what it gives you in terms of your personal journey and how you feel about yourself, that's a priority. I mean you can't put a figure on that, I don't think it can be measured, unless it's measured in smiles. I can't quite put my finger on it but it just works, and it works well - it's just fantastic. I just feel so privileged to be part of it.

Now, with significant support from Crisis, I'm actually no longer homeless and I'm in a relatively stable situation. I volunteer for the Arts and I am a Crisis volunteer as well, so it's kind of full circle. It's allowed me to expand and look forward to the possibility that I could choose a different career path in a more creative environment, or play music, also get some creative stuff back out there, it's just kick-started all that. It just sends you into a much better place, certainly for me.

WE REALLY CREATED A TEAM

**Art flows two ways,
especially in these sorts of
arts. You're taking people on
an emotional journey.**

I'd been wondering for several years about how to do a project with homelessness. I didn't want to just do pictures of people in the streets, because that's not how I approach things, I'm not a photojournalist, and I'm not quite sure what difference those sort of images can make - or I think other images can make more powerful statements and help more. I'd been working on another project several years ago, and I saw that a lot of people don't like to even look at people who are homeless, because I think the moment that your eyes connect, there is some sort of commitment or responsibility to that person with whom you are communicating - and a lot of people don't really want to have homeless people as part of their social responsibility. I think that's wrong.

When you do a project like this, obviously I want to help the people who are involved with the project, but I also want the people who are looking at the project to re-evaluate their own existence, their own commitments, and their own attitudes towards certain things. Art flows two ways, especially in these sorts of arts. You're taking people on an emotional journey.

I'm also, as a photographic artist, interested in why it is that particular images resonate. I think an iconic picture is something that taps into a sort of zeitgeist. I think pretty much all iconic pictures create some sort of emotional response. It's my belief that you can better understand Britishness, if you like, by investigating iconic photographs. I think they sort of capture different qualities, and things of us as British people - and obviously Britishness is such a fluid thing, especially at the moment. Well it's always been fairly fluid, I suppose.

Had there been time, I would have liked to work on images which would be more recognisable to a younger audience, that would have been great. The other thing is, I would have liked to have had more pictures with a broader racial make-up - because there aren't that many iconic images which feature people who aren't white, basically. There were a couple of pictures I wanted to do that were more contemporary - there is a picture that I wanted to do of a young Asian woman called Saffiyah Khan who was facing off a member of the English Defence League, that has almost immediately become sort of an iconic image. I thought that would have been a fantastic image to do, but we ran out of time.

I originally approached Sarah [Visual Arts Programme Manager] who runs the gallery here with the idea, and she liked it, and then arranged a meeting with Jeremy, who runs the OFS, and Rowan, the Crisis Arts Coordinator, who also liked the idea, and then it just kicked off from there. I was given tremendous support, not least by Jeremy who backed me throughout the whole thing, actually. Fundamentally I think I always felt that he had my back. That is pretty helpful as an artist; I'm represented by quite a few galleries, and I definitely have different degrees of support by different galleries, and I felt that he was on my side and he was prepared to back me, and I also felt that Rowan and Jodie [Crisis Arts Tutor] would.

Actually, Rowan and Jodie were just extraordinary. I throw out ideas about every five seconds, and I need certain people to sometimes constrain me, or evaluate my proposals and stuff like that. There were times when they said, 'well, that's not right', and that was brilliant. They acted as sort of brakes.

Well, I think everyone, we really created a team, and I think that's what I've always tried to do, and I think all of that is about listening to other people and hearing what they've got to say, and everyone's got a valid opinion, and it's not run like a dictatorship - everyone's opinion is equally valid. So for me, it's very much working with other people, knowing when you've got to give people space to really develop, and that's always exciting. I'm very happy to listen to other people's ideas. So I think all the members and staff bought into it, so we really created a sort of buzz.

But I think, I always try and have fun with what I'm doing. It's always important to have a lot of fun. So I think we tried to bring fun. With the Spice Girls picture - it's very joyous, actually, that picture. I think that's a joyous picture, and I think the World Cup's a pretty joyous picture - it was a joyous moment. The Spice Girls shoot, I put together the picture, I got it in focus, but it was brilliant - it was very much a girls' show. I wasn't particularly interested in doing the picture because I don't really know if it's an iconic picture but actually the whole performance was just fantastic, and it was particularly nice watching four of the women really manage the more anxious woman, and that was really nice because they themselves, earlier in the whole project, had been pretty anxious themselves. There was one woman who had been there from the beginning, but who hadn't really wanted to talk, and sat in the background. And she just realised 'well I've done this more than anyone else', and started saying you've got to do this, you've got to do that, and that was really... I felt pretty good about that, and I think other people did.

But I get a lot of joy, and also satisfaction, out of working like this, so it was good to do, and some extraordinary, creative people in this whole setup actually. The members themselves were extraordinary. There were a lot of logistical things I don't have access to, you know - like with the tank [for the Margaret Thatcher picture]. There was a guy here who said, 'oh I've got a tank!' I mean, Jesus! 'Is it a Challenger?' 'No, but I know a man who has got one!' So there was a huge amount of help. I don't know if I've been on a journey - I mean I have done this sort of stuff for quite a long time - but it's always developing as an individual. You're always learning, aren't you?

I mean, a couple of things I learned was that we're all only about three decisions away from homelessness, and I think there is a sort of general perception that a lot of homeless people come from a - there's a bit of a cliché of a broken home, that sort of thing, which I didn't share that perception, but I didn't realise that there'd be so many exciting and individual talents who had fallen through that net, and whose company I really enjoyed, actually. I found that really exciting.

There was one guy, I really liked him - for whatever reason, he fell off whatever wagon it was, and so he's moved on. That, for me, that's a real regret, I feel - a sense of failure, actually. I mean, it wasn't my fault, but I would have loved him to have finished the ICON journey. That would have been lovely for me, because I think he would have been really proud, and I don't know where he is now, but that would have been lovely. That's a real shame for me.

But I don't actually think the project has ended for me, this is just the beginning of this project. There's no reason why something like this can't be in some way rolled out, and I think that would be exciting. And there are other conversations I want to throw in the pot - you know Manchester might have its own iconic image, Sheffield might have its own iconic image, Portsmouth might have its own iconic image, and that would be very interesting, you know, work with a bunch of young people, artists, old people, it doesn't have to be homeless people. We can sort of explore... So there's lots of ideas to develop. I knew this idea was going to fly. It's very accessible, a very easy idea - but the more you look at it, the more you can get out of it.

PANKHURST MADE MY WORLD GET WIDER

Being involved in the ICON project give me much better understanding of empathy and trust. I feel ICON at all times as a warmth in my heart. It's real, I feel it.

I think Jodie [Crisis Arts Tutor] told me, she told me 'it would be good idea if you would be Pankhurst'. I decided it, uh, it, would be very interesting to be Pankhurst.

And it was very interesting – because by being dressed as her, posing as her, I became Pankhurst, I feel myself as Pankhurst. It gave me a much clearer picture of her as a woman.

I think it was very important for me and for many people. Because it was opportunity to think about a person who did a lot of good things for women and for the world. Emmeline showed that one person can open the world and give people the opportunity to decide how to think, feel, and act. Emmeline help women step up a level.

But, I tell you what Pankhurst made for me more. Now I feel myself not my age, not seventy-nine, I feel like I am twenty-five. Much energy. Much energy; I can concentrate on important things. I admire now many women who have helped to change the world. Like Ellen Sirleaf, the first female president in Africa. Pankhurst make me think about women who make a lot for the world. She opened my eyes. Yes, yes. And Rosa Parks, who helped to end segregation.

Also, many more people who do good works. Without, uh, without ever being famous. Like my friend, Alison Michael. Nearly, nearly ninety years old, who was and will be my icon, who uses warmth, friendliness and kindness. My best friend, my icon. And for me, everyone who works at Crisis and the Old Fire Station can be icon. Because I have never seen, and I never can imagine, that people could be so kind, so clever, so patient.

Because Pankhurst is in every person. Being involved in the ICON project, give me much better understanding of empathy and trust. I feel ICON at all times as a warmth in my heart. It's real, I feel it.

Yes. Yes, yes, it changed me as person. I think that something changed inside me. I became not so strong to criticise myself. I became more confident when I look at world through the eyes of Pankhurst.

After ICON, I wrote a song, it's my first song, and I performed my song on stage. Because, because, Pankhurst made me more confident. I think it maybe was, uh, buried deep inside me, because before Crisis, before ICON, I was a very shy person. Shy. Shy. I..I am afraid to ask something, I am afraid to go somewhere, I am afraid I didn't know how to react.

In the photo I was Emmeline Pankhurst. And yes, it gave me another life. Yes. I feel that I have another life. Pankhurst, Pankhurst opened for me, really opened my eyes. Pankhurst made my world get wider.

**PEOPLE WILL
REMEMBER
THESE PICTURES
FOR A LONG,
LONG TIME**

**It's something that I'll
remember, definitely,
because it obviously saved
my situation, helped me a lot.
Because these pictures will
be around forever won't they?**

I moved to Oxford after being homeless on and off for about two years. I just wanted to be around people I could trust, I guess. I just wanted a little bit of normality. When you're homeless, you don't have much confidence in yourself, you get dragged down. Even walking down the street, however well-dressed you are, you always feel slightly inferior to other people. It's the way you feel inside. You lose confidence in people, you lose confidence in yourself.

You walk down the street and a lot of people have been through bad experiences, but they don't talk about it and sometimes people are ashamed of it. The first move is the hardest, you know? Some people are just stuck in it all the time, and need opportunities to express themselves. Normally I wanted to stay away from people, you know, not embarrass myself - but I'd just had enough really and I thought this would help me. I just wanted to engage with something, with - I wouldn't say 'like-minded' people - but people who have been through the same thing. It's nice to get your brain working again. So coming to the Old Fire Station, actually meeting respectful nice people made a refreshing change. I was dubious to start with, but once you get into it...I've been doing the same job for so many years so it has opened my mind to doing other things, rather than just working to survive. It's important to do things that you actually enjoy, isn't that what life's all about? I want a little bit more than existence. I want to get up in the morning and think 'yeah I want to do this'.

I was interested in doing the photography side of things generally, then I found out that they were doing the ICON project. I used to look forward to coming in every Thursday morning, half past ten, like 'oh, what are we going to do today?' and they'd say, 'we've got to do this', 'got to go there'. There's a huge attention to detail paid in terms of the physical surroundings - the lighting, the props, the costumes, everything. It was a group effort all round, it was everyone engaging one hundred percent. I was a little bit wary to start with, then when you get into character and you know everyone's in the same boat sort of thing. There's nothing to feel nervous about really. And plus it gets people thinking about what went on in that era. You know, you learn a lot from the past, so it's nice to be able to understand other people as well, and what other people have gone through.

A lot of the pictures are quite political, aren't they? Which I think is quite important because it raises more awareness of the way the country was run and helps reflect on how it's run now. Some people love the Spice Girls, some people hate them, but it's a thing which changed the country I think, you know? Like it or hate it, it did change things, all the pictures had quite a big impact on the country at the time. It shows a passage of time, definitely.

I liked when I did the Bloody Sunday one. It was quite controversial, it raised awareness of the trouble that went on years ago. A lot of things like that were just brushed under the carpet, but

when you actually read into things you think, 'wow, things like that really did happen'. There's so many clamp downs on people protesting and things like that, sometimes people don't have enough of a voice, you know? For that photo I brought my trimmers in and Jodie [Crisis Arts Tutor] shaved my head down the middle so I looked like the Priest. So there's Rory's son dressed up as the injured person with fake blood all down his face, and there's me as a priest smoking with a cigarette. And doing the Bullingdon Club we're all dressed in tops and tails, walking down the street. We got a few strange looks for those crossing the road - people peering round the curtains, everyone staring at us thinking 'what are they doing?'

It's all about trying new things, isn't it? A couple of people made comments to me saying 'oh you should do amateur dramatics' and stuff like that. I think that would be good because it's good for people's confidence, you know, broadening people's horizons and finding out what people are good at and what they enjoy, because some people don't even know it, do they? You sort of lose your way a little bit when all you're doing is working, coming home, working, studying- you know? This has given me an opportunity to take a step back and look at myself and you know think, what do I really want out of life?

It's helped me a lot, and all the things like tied in together, you know - me starting here, me stopping drinking, sorting financial things out and things which I've been putting off. It's like two cogs slotting in together. I think everyone who was involved would love to do the project again, you know, because it gets people together. Everyone got on absolutely perfectly, you know? Everyone was polite to each other, we all had a laugh, no one ever fell out, no one said 'do this, do that', it was like a team. It's something that I'll remember, definitely, because it obviously saved my situation, helped me a lot. Because these pictures will be around forever won't they? And people will remember these for a long, long time.

WE'RE ALL HUMAN

It sort of gave me a realisation of how important our work is here. Because they remember who they were, they want to move back to how it was. They want to move forward in their life.

I've always been curious about art. I can't draw, I can't paint, but I'm really interested. I work for Crisis. I started going along to the ICON sessions – I suppose it would be nosiness, curiosity, wanting to see, 'oh what's this about, what are they going to be doing'?

When I went into the classroom Rory [Lead Artist] didn't sit on his high horse and say, 'but I'm the professional'. He'd give them advice, and help them learn in a really nice, gentle way, and they'd come up with the answer. It was really good watching that. It was their project. They were owning the project. This is what we want. It was really nice watching that, how they were in charge and they were deciding what was going to happen, and how it was going to happen.

I spoke to someone about ICON, and it was what it did to his face – what I saw in his eyes, the words he used. I think we can't sometimes see the wood from the trees in how we work with members and what we can do. We deal with them on a certain level with certain issues, and we can get lost in all that. This member, he usually has a 'my way or the highway' sort of thing. But watching him listening to other people, and letting other people have the input...it actually changed him. I noticed him come into the building, completely dressed differently. How he stood. How he talked. He said something really moving, he said, 'this is me, before I became homeless, this is me'. And just by him saying 'this is me' gave me a bigger picture of him and who he was. It sort of gave me a realisation of how important our work is here. Because they remember who they were, they want to move back to how it was. They want to move forward in their life.

There's another member who's having difficulty with family at the minute. She said, 'my mum bought two of the ICON tea towels and she won't use them'. That's the first thing she said, about the ICON project. So it was much bigger than actually being in the photograph, much bigger than doing the work. It was...her mum. There's hardship and conflict at home. There was a moment of respite there, I suppose, with her mum. Having them tea towels. Like an unspoken message from mother to daughter - 'I'm proud, I bought not just one', because it weren't cheap, 'I bought two. And I'm going to keep them. I'm not going to use them'.

An outsider might not understand what we do here. Might think, how's photography going to help? But seeing the change, what it does for them, how it motivates them. How it helps with self-belief, self-worth, self-esteem, and it gives them that...rise in how they walk and how they carry themselves. I'm more aware of the importance it can have in people, and how it can help people. They might say 'well I've never done anything like that' and whereas before I could say things like 'well yeah you're right, if you've never even been interested, let's move on'. But talking to them about how it could influence them and the other aspects, it's not just being involved in the arts, it's what they can get out of it. It's watching people grow and develop through it.

I'm not usually self-conscious, but when we were shooting the Bloody Sunday photo I was.

They were shooting me straight and we got cameras and lights, and I'm thinking, this is a bit overwhelming. But the members took charge. I had to be conscious that I'm a staff member and I work here, so I have to behave in a certain way. I have boundaries. But we're all doing the same thing, and when I was getting it wrong, the members were telling me I was getting it wrong. And instead of me being, 'what do you mean I'm getting it wrong? I'm in charge here, I work here', it was like, 'what do I need to do? Can you help me?'. We're all human beings. I might work here, they might be a member here, but we're all human beings. We've all got needs and together we can help each other achieve whatever it is. A member telling me, it can be a complete role reversal. Instead of me enabling them and advising them, it was them enabling me and advising me. They're taking me forward and helping me identify my strength to overcome a barrier. So I walked away actually smiling from that.

We've only got two pictures on the wall in our house. When I was given one of the ICON pictures I said to my wife, 'what about if we give it to Mum?'. My wife said 'no, I want that'. I said, 'pardon?', she said, 'you understand how good this picture is? This is a really, really good picture'. I didn't think she understood art, but she recognised it as being really good. We've got thousands of photographs on Instagram and Facebook, and she never once said 'oh that's a really good picture' – but she saw that and recognised straight away that it is. So I think that's proof in the pudding that like, it's a really good piece of art by some really good artists. The attitude was never 'that will do', it was 'no this isn't right, this is what we need to do'. And it was people listening to each other, communicating with each other, not taking offense if someone said 'you do that wrong'. And then working on it until they say 'yes, we got it right.' It weren't 'yeah, this is as good as we're going to get', it was like, 'no, this is good'.

On the exhibition opening day my wife said 'how many people?' and I said 'oh about 15, 20 I imagine'. And I got there, and it was...wow. I could hear all these conversations going on, and they were all speaking about the quality, how good it was and how blown away they were. People with all sorts of accents. They had just seen something that was really, really good. And Crisis artists had done that.

One of the members in the Q&A, his mum said, 'I've got my son back'. I got emotional. She's an artist. I bet she's gone through a lot of 'what did I do wrong? Where did I go wrong?' and then for her son to be a major part in an exhibition. Being an artist and recognising he's getting better in his life and everything else. We deal with a lot of sadness. So just seeing some happiness like that, that was real emotional. That weren't just somebody saying it because they was here. It felt sort of voyeuristic, because that was really personal and intimate. The constraints of society didn't mean anything. I don't personally show a lot of love and attachment to people I love in public, or anything like that. To say something meaningful like that, and not to be caring or bothering about other people, it's really powerful on a human level. It's really happy that they found that common ground.

I try to go to every art class and have a look. If I don't go, a couple of member say 'you didn't come to art'. I think I'll just keep being nosily curious and hopefully I'll get caught on a hook that'll inspire me to something else as well, and walk alongside members and ask why they're doing something. I like to ask them questions about what they're getting from it. What was it for them? What did it mean to them? What's next for them?

IT FELT LIKE THEY WERE EVERYBODY'S PHOTOGRAPHS

People were genuinely moved by it, the effect it had on some of the members seemed to be a great thing. I suppose we all felt a bit changed by the project in the end.

I'd recently come out of a full-time job at an interior company and I wanted to get back to my roots a bit – I'd worked in costume for film and TV productions for about 10 years previously. I was already volunteering with Crisis in their 'Make and Mend' class so I was involved and knew a few of the members. I met Rowan [Crisis Arts Co-ordinator] towards the end of the previous year and she'd mentioned about the project then, I was absolutely delighted to be asked.

I was the stylist for each photograph, so I was involved in getting costumes and props. Quite often I would email round at the start of the week - to a core group and say, 'who's got this, and who's got that', because as much as possible we were trying not to spend any money. Then it would just be a case of trawling the charity shops. We used Oxford Drama Wardrobe quite a bit and Creation Theatre's store in Banbury, and then the rest would be sort of cobbling together, and I'd make and adjust things. A lot of the time we did a direct copy of the photograph, but sometimes we would do a modern take on it - like Thatcher and the tank.

Members would also be involved with getting props and costumes, I remember, one of the members would be like 'you need to speak to Tank Nut Dave, he can lend you a tank,' and we'd be 'brilliant!', because you'd be thinking, 'how on earth are we going to do this project?'. I think that was important with the costume and props, that if people felt like they wanted to get involved, they could. It was very collaborative. I think everyone felt on a level, on the same level, there didn't feel a degree of hierarchy. It felt like they were everybody's photographs. Also on a professional level we couldn't put up something that was substandard. Rory [Lead Artist] wanted to make sure that the costumes and props were proper, the police uniforms were proper. You don't want it to look like fancy dress. I think we achieved that.

Some photos were quite 'off-the-cuff' as well. For example Bloody Sunday wasn't one that was in the mix, and then one week the group just decided they wanted to do it, I only had a couple of days to get things together. The details mattered. For example, a Catholic priest has a tonsure collar. We don't want to get that sort of detail wrong, because you want to pay respect. I ordered a vicar's shirt, but it wasn't going to come in time, so I phoned our local vicar and asked 'any chance you could lend us a shirt and a scarf?'. What was quite nice was that - he was very willing, but he was also then very interested in the project and was invited to the launch. Similarly, with the Bullingdon Club picture, Shepherd and Woodward lent us all the suits through one of the members contacts who was an old friend of the owner, Brilliant! . I'm in the Bullingdon Club at the back actually. I hate having my photograph taken, camera shy, but you're being someone else, you're pulling a different face, being an arrogant young man, and I think definitely that helps. It's a bit of disguise, isn't it?

The one I was most worried about was the Miner's Supper. My background's mainly in costume,

suddenly we had this very heavy sort of prop shoot going on. I've done quite a lot of set dressing work at the interiors company and always felt when you're trying to make somewhere look like a room it ends up looking like a photoshoot. I think we did incredibly well. The picture looks like a room, and it looks so much like the real picture. It was the second photo of the day, we did Christine Keeler before it, and it took quite a while because it's a very intimate photo, and then suddenly we're sort of dashed down to do this Miner's Supper, and we've only got like an hour to get this. But yeah, I think it's brilliant.

Getting that one done and dusted meant we felt quite confident with the rest, I suppose. I think also the whole team got very good at taking a picture. Bloody Sunday, for example. I think we got that shot in about 20 minutes or something. The people behind the camera got very good at giving direction, the people in the picture got used to listening. It became quite a professional outfit, if you like. And we did a follow-up picture for the general public, the Sergeant Pepper picture, where the members from ICON directed the photoshoot, and you could tell that they were just good and knew their stuff.

I just felt completely at home with the project and the people. I think it's one of the best projects I've worked on. Just the camaraderie. Everyone felt very committed to pulling it off against the odds - you just think, crikey, how are we going to get these photographs done, where are we going to get the tank from, how are we going to make the Pankhurst work? A real team effort. And everyone was so immensely proud at the launch night of what we had achieved and how the photographs looked. People were genuinely moved by it, the effect it had on some of the members seemed to be a great thing. I suppose we all felt a bit changed by the project in the end.

BEGINNING OF A GREAT SITUATION

I genuinely felt that this could be a beginning of a great situation in my life, around other people's great situations in their lives Through such a simple thing as photography.

I thought it would just be a small project, but it's turned out to be a fantastic thing that I'm experiencing. This is more for me than an exhibition. To me, this is a whole experience, and it's really done something for me.

Before this I hadn't done photography for a while so I thought I'd get back into it and see if I still enjoyed it, because my history is very artistic, my mum's very artistic. Before she retired she was an art lecturer - so it seemed like a natural thing for me to progress with. Rory [Lead Artist] was very amenable, and he was very easy to talk to. From the beginning, he smiled, was naturally encouraging and he showed his passion. I said, 'I've only been doing this for a year or two. I'm nowhere near you' and he said, 'don't underestimate yourself, you've got that natural artistic thing that you got from your mum, a good eye'. For the exhibition opening I have to be on my best behaviour because my mum will be there to see it...she'll be there to inspect what her son's been up to!

The first one I did, which was actually the first one in the sequence, was Abbey Road - the Beatles doing the zebra crossing. Like with anyone doing anything new you have a nervousness. But I knew I wasn't going through it on my own. I felt that we were all going into a new branch of something that was going to be very revealing and very exciting. The four of us had this telepathic way of doing the steps, it felt like we had a sort of shared understanding as a whole team. We finished it and we were very satisfied. It turned out really well. Basically, once that first one had been done I saw the relief on Rory's face, 'we've got something here, we can reach the skies with this', you know?

I think the Winston Churchill experience was my favourite. Jodie [Crisis Arts Tutor] says, 'guys, I've got someone in mind to do Churchill'. She looked at me and I say, 'Me!?! Churchill?'. She says, 'You would make a really good Churchill. You can be pretty grumpy at times, so have a go.' And so I became Churchill for the day. I was taking the spotlight that week. I had a feeling that maybe I was taking too much of it, portraying someone who's that famous, iconic, but the other guys just basically said 'no you're right for it, why not do it?'

Being Churchill revealed something about me which I didn't consciously know. Jodie would say something - a key word - and it just basically got me in the frame of Churchill's mind and feelings - an instinct thing. The double chin and the expression, the forehead. I went somewhere else and Churchill sort of took my body over. It just seemed right. For the first photo it felt like, 'oh this is happening for the first time' and then for the next ones it was like, 'oh it's come back again', you know, and I thought 'ok, accept it, go with it'.

I was far more relaxed on the Miner's Strike one. That was one of the pictures I wasn't in, I was more around the periphery of the actual photoshoot - taking the before, during and after shots. It

was a new experience for me to be part of the camera crew and I enjoyed it thoroughly. It revealed a lot about me - how relaxed I could be, and how I could take criticism as well.

The next one was Bloody Sunday. I remember the whole team were quite serious. There was hardly any laughing. We were fully aware that even today, after god knows how many years, it's still a sore point to people. It's flashing back now just talking about it... the enormity of it, human nature, what people do to one another. Its horrific, you know? I didn't really have to think much to get into the part of this one. The subject matter was just easy to get into the right mood. This one will be one of the big ones at the exhibition. It's a different 'wow' isn't it?

Doing the Bullingdon Club picture made me more connected to the family unit – the feeling of being part of a family. We were all getting involved in our different ways with our different personalities, and we each had something to give, all of us. I feel personally it's made three of us members in particular quite close, and anyone else who wants to join us, they join a merry band of men and women.

So by this time I'd experienced so many different techniques and had been involved in so many different ways. I would love to do it again actually, the whole thing, because it's taken myself out of myself. The introverted side to me is long gone. I genuinely felt that this could be a beginning of a great situation in my life, around other people's great situations in their lives. Through such a simple thing as photography.

I first came to Crisis over a year ago now. I was overwhelmed to begin with, not knowing what to expect. I had the advantage of knowing Jodie, so that helped. From there it's just been a natural progression. It's happened over a period of time, that's why I'm so comfortable with it. This building just seemed a natural sort of extension to my life, another step for me.

I'm in continuous recovery. A routine's great, and that's what I managed to do with my work, Crisis, and with the Old Fire Station. Some people in recovery can't find those stepping stones and that I've found mine, I'm very thankful for that. It means I can live for the moment, have all my support behind me, in front of me, beside me, and it's you guys here, all of you, you know?

Before I went to rehab, that was very much the old part of me, the mad hectic person. He 'died' at 42 and this is the 'new me'. That's how I look at it. If you'd asked me about this project at 42, I would have been... 'I just want to be on my own and just leave me alone' attitude, you know? But the 'new me', it was as if I was a ten-year-old and you know Rory came into my life saying 'we're going to do a huge project. We're going to take some iconic pictures, and we're going to put our own interpretation on them,' at ten I was like 'wow, yeah I want to do that!', you know?

I think Rowan [Crisis Arts Co-ordinator] wants me to work on stuff in the future. I take a while to convince, but actually, secretly I enjoy doing what I do. Any new ideas that she might have, I'm quite willing to listen to. It's a nice thing feeling I'm being pushed in a direction, moving forward.

LOOKING AT THINGS DIFFERENTLY

When I became homeless, I stopped feeling any sense of belonging, anywhere. It was a sense of loss. And now, I'm quite happy. I got that back. Through this place.

Well, I stopped being a member in June, and that was difficult. Because you know, throughout my life I've done plenty of stuff where you think 'right, now I'm moving on'... Moving on again, moving on... Moving on... you know, I was feeling absolutely bereft, cos there were some kinds of moving on where you think 'that's good; I'm glad', you know, new challenge, whatever. Then there are others, like my two divorces, for instance, where you think 'oh by God, I wish that hadn't happened'. Or I wish it hadn't happened the way it did. Eh, and this was one of those... I'm never gonna get this back. Crisis is something very special. The Old Fire Station is a place where, not only are you treated like a human being, but you're welcomed, and told that you're a valuable member of the place. And that's why, you know, when it comes to an end, it's a wrench.

Yeah, so when my time came to an end, they said 'oh you can still come in for ICON' and I said 'oh, great!'. But for me it was a little bit bittersweet, really, because it just reminded me what I was missing. Just coming in for that one session a week. I was loving it, but at the same time, I just thought mmmmm, y'know... I'm not a member anymore.

But because it was such an immersive project, I didn't feel like that when we were doing it. I suppose my main input, apart from being in a lot of the pictures and discussions, came right at the very beginning, when we were discussing what we meant by iconic. I said for me, something is iconic if it has a resonance that goes beyond the immediate or the manipulative. I mean like the photograph of Wayne as Gazza all tearful with his shirt up to his face is a heart-breaking photograph, it really is, and iconic in the sense that that was probably the first time that any macho sportsman had actually broken down like that. That was a real watershed moment and that was what I found with some of these pictures - it's a moment where something changed and it's a moment where, personally, it changed me.

The actual decision-making process was wildly anarchic! Rory [Lead Artist] and Rowan and Jody [Crisis Arts Tutors] were very keen that everyone was involved in all the decisions, even tiny little things and big ones. It was a question initially of deciding which photos were going to make the cut, and which weren't. They brought in dozens and dozens of photos, and said right, has anybody got any other suggestions... I said Bloody Sunday, somebody else said Gazza... It was, it was, you know, open democracy. It was great, because the leaders led to begin with, and then everybody else piled in - and it was that sort of thing all the way through.

We didn't agree on all of the pictures. There were people saying oh, I'm too young for this and for instance, the Bloody Sunday one, it was obvious that quite a few people in the group knew nothing about it... I said you've got to understand what this picture represents, and why it resonates, and the thing is that after we'd done the pictures, a lot of people would say... I get it now. I didn't get the original image, but now we've gone through it, you know, and everything we've had to do with it, and

we've got this young man, Rory's son, playing the body, covered in fake blood, I was covered in blood all over me jacket and everything, and it kind of brought it home to people...

One of the great things about the process was that everybody was encouraged to suggest things. You were encouraged to have your say and to respect other people for having their say, and that is a thing about personal growth. You find, well, I was much happier being part of that group than I ever thought I would be, because it's very easy to find fault with things... If you've got people with all different abilities, different points of view and so on. But it was 'leave your ego at the door'. Do your best, do your bit. Appreciate what everybody else is doing. Feed off the atmosphere in the room, or on the shoot, and respect the process.

Towards the end... people were coming out with stuff and you thought 'you've learned a lot doing this!'. It's that great thing of learning without being taught, learning through the process, and that's the kind of learning that stays with you. It got me looking at things in a different way and thinking critically.

And, like everybody else there were times I was quite nervous about what I was doing. I thought, oh God, I hope I haven't, you know, I hope I'm getting this right. And then we'd all crowd round the camera and have a quick look, and you'd go 'oh yes, looking OK'. And then we'd all make suggestions... don't you think we should be a little bit more oblique, or I think the camera should be six foot this way... And Rory was great, he'd say, yeah, give it a go. It was massively democratic. It was hugely creative. It was great fun. It was very, what's the word, disciplined, in a creative way, and nobody had to be told to do it that way. It was just a group ethos. And that's what has been the thing that I have most taken away from the Old Fire Station, really.

I've done lots of things over my time here... Sawdust [the Hidden Spire play] was great for me, to be sitting there reading a script and trying to memorise it. Just the experience of being back in the saddle made such a difference to me. I remember my ex said to me God, you're like a different man these days.

And Words as Weapons [AOFS creative writing project] was likewise. It was a voyage of discovery, and a voyage of self-discovery as well. I didn't know that I could write stuff like that, and then, you know, I carried on writing poetry after that, and I was so proud of my Sleeping Rough one, I hadn't felt proud of myself... in that way... for so long.

ICON was for me just the icing on the cake, cos it was something that two or three years ago I would never have thought I could ever get involved in. Well, back then, I'd have probably thought it would be beneath me. You know – 'I'm better than that'! And... so it's taught me a lot. You know, self-knowledge... And my own opinion of myself. It's actually made me a bit kinder to myself, cos I think... the way I used to be, was quite difficult, quite a difficult way to get through life.

I found all of those things I've done here every bit as rewarding as anything I've ever done before. Really, seriously. And yet, on paper, up until that point, I'd done quite a lot. When I first came to Crisis I was desperate... I was an empty vessel, desperate to be filled up again, and for me, creativity has always done that, always makes me feel complete, and so the huge variety of stuff that I was doing by the end, I just felt incredibly accomplished.

My time here has made me, most of all, look at other people differently. I mean, I've always been a fairly judgemental sort of character, but I realised that you couldn't do that here. And actually, it opened me up. I met such a massive variety of people. More than I've ever met anywhere... you never meet the sort of shifting population that makes up Crisis and the Old Fire Station, and you come to treasure it. I'm really proud that I made friends here. I've worked with some fantastic actors, you know, household names, and all of that, in the past. And I've also worked with Martin and AJ and Rowan and Emma and, you know ... Sawdust... and the group that made up ICON. Just so rewarding... I would go home at night feeling well, job well done. What a good day, and I can't wait to get up tomorrow and go in and do some more.

When I became homeless, I stopped feeling any sense of belonging, anywhere. It was a sense of loss. And now, I'm quite happy. I got that back. Through this place. I mean, just as ICON got me looking at things differently, Crisis made me think differently.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN I CAN DO IF I'VE DONE THIS?

I'm sure there's more sides to me that I didn't even know about. I need to explore that because I haven't been happy before. I need to see what else is out there.

I've been coming to Crisis for about a year. In the beginning it would just be once a week or something, because I found it really hard to be in a classroom situation. I would feel trapped. Here it didn't feel difficult, I felt welcome but not pressured. When you go into a classroom everyone says "hello" and I've never had that anywhere else. Every day is a new day and everyone's greeted the same. It seems like it's a place that's for everyone.

It was a group project rather than them telling us what to do, which is how I thought it would be. Everyone would be there to help out when they could. It wasn't patronising, it was everyone having their input. We couldn't have done it all by ourselves, it's there because we did it together. I used to hate things in groups and classrooms, it was my worst nightmare, but I realised after doing this I actually like going to group things. I had no idea! I think the reason I would turn up is because I thought they're relying on me, then by the end of it I realised I'm kind of doing it for myself as well.

I used to find it hard to talk if it was in groups, I'd just go silent. But when we had a few sessions where we were just doing discussions, say if I felt I didn't want to say anything for the whole first half and then I'd say something, it was like – I wasn't made to feel weird about it. I've had that before, everyone's looking at me, whispering or whatever. Here they just understand that people sometimes need to take their time. If one of us had an idea about something, everyone would listen to it, it was discussed. And it's nice when people listen to what I say and want to know my opinions. I've just never had that before. I feel like I'm actually 'seen'. Here, I actually feel like a real person. I'm not just there to do things for others or whatever, this is something that's actually for me.

I didn't really have much confidence, before this I'd always been in the background. I never used to want to be in photos. As a kid I always wanted to hide, because I thought 'I'm ugly', you know one of those people that just refuses to be in any photos? The first picture I was in, they wanted me to be Bobby Moore, so I was literally at the front. I was the main character, and I thought, yeah, why not? I think, when I look back on this, what am I going to look back on? I'm going to look back on either refusing to do the project, or I'm going to look back on 'oh yeah, we made this cool thing'. Now I look at the bigger picture.

I didn't feel under the spotlight in any of the photos. I thought I would have felt like all eyes were on me, but it didn't feel like that, because you're playing a part. We were making a picture for the project, not because we want to show one person off or whatever. I would always hide in the past and not take part in things because it could go wrong or I might be judged. But in ICON you're not being put on the spot, because everyone's doing it as well. I didn't feel any pressure at all or any sense of I'm being judged, which is weird, because I always used to feel like I was being judged.

I saw the whole thing through to the end, and that was good knowing I could do that. I normally get put off, like if they said this was a five month project, before that would put me off because I'd think, I don't know if I can do it for that amount of time. But they'd say 'next week we're going to have the photo shoot' and I'd say 'OK I'll turn up to that one' – and before I knew it, I'd already done the whole second half that I was planning to do. So now I know I can do these things, just to turn up and do it rather than thinking about it. So it's helped my confidence.

I used to talk myself out of things. I wouldn't try things because I'd be like 'oh but I know it's going to go wrong, I know this is going to happen'. I'm not saying that I feel like a totally different person, but it's progress. Everything might not be better in a day, it's going to take a while. But nothing bad has happened, even though I was worrying about it, and that's proved to me I can just keep going. Because you just don't know what's around the corner.

I used to think I didn't really have expressions, but then in these photographs we had to do a different expression in every picture. Someone said to me, 'oh you manage to be so different in every picture' – like, when Rory [Lead Artist] asked us to do an expression, he had to ask some people to do it differently, but I found I could just do the expression. When I saw the photos I thought, 'I didn't know I looked like that'.

When you're stuck in the same rut you don't really have a wide range of feelings or expressions and stuff, you're just like...everything's all one way. But then coming here, you just see more of yourself. You see different sides to yourself. Just being able to be calm and happy, and just getting on with people. I used to think people were going to bully me wherever I go, but that has just not happened at all, it's such a different experience now.

I used to like creative things at home. But when you're at home you just go off the task. Coming here it's so much easier, because you're coming here for that purpose. Everyone else is creating something too, and you just feel understood and encouraged. Because there's exhibitions here and there just seems to be art around, you feel more inspired as well, and you just think like – other people are creating things, and when I see that it makes me want to create more things as well. It's like a never-ending thing, what you can make.

I have more belief in myself, that's the main thing. It was just a positive experience, the whole thing was positive, I don't think there was anything bad about it. I don't have any regrets at all. I thought I was that person who was too scared and anxious and had nothing to say. I feel like the only reason I thought I was that person is because other people have told me that. Now, I'm really curious – what does this mean I can do, if I've done this? I'm sure there's more sides to me that I didn't even know about. I need to explore that because I haven't been happy before. I need to see what else is out there.

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EVALUATION REPORT**

