

## January 2026 Newsletter

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**A personal reflection around the power of participation in a project  
to reduce the carbon footprint of a market town in North Yorkshire**

**By Linda Courage**



"Outcomes are better when you involve citizens"

Our Zero Selby lead, 2025



*Preparing for the Selby sustainable fashion show*

In the 1990's a group of research assistants in the University of Hull came to tell me of a new community development approach they'd experienced and that they were sure I'd enjoy. I joined the next experiential course in Participatory Appraisal, led by Tilly Sellers in the Department of Public Health Medicine and members of the Institute of Development Studies from the University of Sussex ([www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)), and it turned me upside down, and inside out.

The approach accepts that communities, with skilled facilitated support that can be taught, can use visual tools to discuss and understand the causes and potential solutions of issues they are experiencing. Professionals learn from rather than teach people - a humbling and at times a quite painful but ultimately liberating experience.

	How much effect	How easy		
		Very	Quite	Not
Big	Sow seeds + plant cuttings	Get dog walkers to use one bit of common ground	Get police + council to deal with joyriders - build humps across road/carpark	
Medium		Cut down bushes where people mainline drugs		
Little	Block holes in bridge fencing to stop toddlers falling in			

Fig. 9.2 An example of an impact ranking to measure the impact that different actions would have on the area. This tool is one that can be identified in a mapping exercise (Fig. 9.1) would have on the area. This tool is one that can be used to analyse information produced earlier in the PA process. The labels of the rows and columns will reflect the type of analysis required, for example, cost, resources needed, who will be affected, how safe people will feel, etc. If 'Post-its' are used for ideas and solutions, they can be moved from box to box until they are in the most appropriate place.

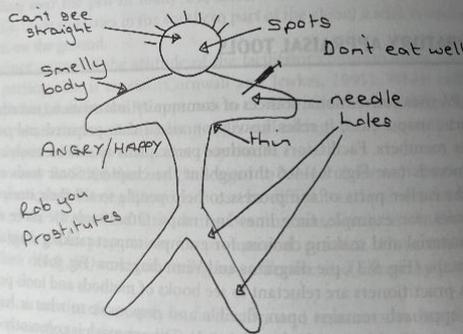


Fig. 9.3 An example of a drawing to uncover children's understanding of the impact that drugs have on health. Body maps are familiar to nurses involved in pain control, for example. They have a variety of uses and can uncover the nature of beliefs about how the body works or is affected by the issue being discussed.

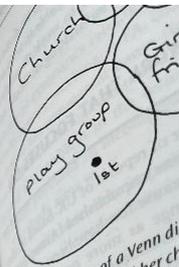


Fig. 9.4 An example of a Venn diagram showing relationships between everyday activities to reflect how her support network would access if her support network would ask for advice if...

we often use beer mats story around our tables In some PA situations issues are complex and community violence chapatis and grains UK, the ground, pa

**Box 9.3 An ex**

A simple illustr group of local to change w participants been ment found the the probl being ab Cornwall school London childr

As a child of the 1950's I'm not alone in having experienced 'the rod', and being 'seen and not heard'. As an introvert living life from an internalised place of fear and control rather than a spacious sense of freedom and having a voice had made the concept of participation difficult in later life. Mastery of facts and gaining a string of qualifications, none of which I inhabited, became my road.

There can be such a contrast between a learned controlled inner world of 'I know best', and experiencing the creativity and freedom of true participation: a sense of wonder can be released that no amount of study and qualifications can touch! That week spent in the poorest areas of Hull learning and using participatory approaches was such for me - a fulcrum moment.

It isn't difficult for me to imagine the effect of control within individuals and families having an effect on societies, professions, institutions, countries and governments that are then acted out on the world stage. Families and work places have a culture of often unconscious norms that shape behaviour.

Voices that are heard, understood and nurtured in childhood, workplaces, and communities

(and no doubt many that aren't) can birth Nevalnys and Zelenskys. Voices that are silenced and ridiculed can lead to environments where people can't speak out and where a sump of anxiety, anger, and perhaps fear pervades the culture of the place, whether that be a profession, government or country.

The concept of participation is a political one in that participation requires a sharing of power. There needs to be a valuing and trust of 'the other' by the person, professional or organisation that currently controls the situation, i.e. has the power. An outcome of this valuing and trust is those with 'the power' hand over control, in whatever form that power is exercised. There are many barriers to this trust and power sharing, and training courses in participatory approaches allow time, space and support for personal barriers to be explored and understood.

The degree to which participation takes place in participatory research and development can be seen as a spectrum. At one end local people are involved in token ways and at the other end learning takes place with local people so that bespoke plans and actions can emerge. Facilitators of the participatory process are catalysts rather than experts, levelling the playing field so that facilitators and participants are free to learn together.

Tools to facilitate participants tell the story of communities and uncover issues are often visual and use simple materials that are readily available, for example, beer mats, post-its, highlighter pens, pebbles and the like. We often naturally use items on our dinner tables to tell and illustrate our stories. Using this approach can uncover more in depth and useful insights than more traditional methods.

One example of using participatory tools that I developed as a result of attending the course was to use student drawn pie diagrams rather than lecturer generated questionnaires to evaluate courses. At the beginning of each module I asked students to draw a pie with three or four named and different sized slices that represented the three or four things they hoped to get out of the modules. The size of each slice represented how important the areas were to them.

At the end of the module I asked them to colour in each slice, from the centre, to reflect to what extent their hopes had been met. A slice with very little coloured meant I hadn't covered that area enough for that student, and slices that were nearly full meant that the course was satisfying that hope for that student. Looking through how students named their slices, and to what extent they had been met gave me far more useful information than scantily completed questionnaires that touched what I thought important.

An outcome of using this approach to materials is that the exercise can be done spontaneously, and people who find writing difficult, or who are reluctant to speak in a group, can give their input.

The number of studies and community movements that have used participatory approaches has grown steadily in the UK since the 1990's, involving health and education, community and other settings.

The Institute of Development Studies in the University of Sussex ([www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)) has offered a wealth of resources and training courses to embed the use of participatory approaches around the world. More recently, the Involve organisation ([www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)) states it works to make public participation and deliberation part of our democracy in the UK, and help solve the big challenges of our time.

To read about how this approach has been successfully used in the Our Zero Selby Project, and for a list of useful resources on this theme, go to:

<https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Power-of-Participation.pdf>

**Linda Courage** is a retired nurse with a background in science. She lives with her cat, Molly, and is currently enjoying her allotment and being a foster mum to hedgehogs. Recent decades have seen her discover and share expressive art and spirituality practices. A contemplative who likes people, she is drawn to local community projects that foster wellbeing and move us towards net zero. She is a member of the Living Spirituality Connections core group.

## The Many Faces of Hope in Difficult Times

By Heather-Jane Ozanne



*“Stay hopeful – no conflict lasts forever.”* - Ibrahim Issa, Director of Hope Flowers School, Bethlehem

I am writing in January 2026, and the above words were spoken by Ibrahim in late 2025 in a Zoom call updating UK supporters on the dire and traumatic situation facing Gaza and the Occupied Territories. These words were spoken amidst turmoil, grief and danger and demonstrated the resilience of a man of peace devoted to a school educating its students

for ‘the wellbeing of humanity’. They are a testament to the ability of an attuned human heart to find empowering hope even in dire situations.

In our world today, everywhere we turn we are confronted with growing polarisation amongst people and in politics as well as the enormous destructive effects of climate change and economic instability. How can we remain hopeful and take positive actions in the light of the many catastrophes and conflicts? Each time I connect with the enormity of what is going on I have a sense of grief, but from this grief arises a new sense of urgency to make whatever small contribution I can towards a world where all can flourish. The circumstances of our world can seem overwhelming, and this overwhelm can cause people to deny or close their minds to what is happening in and around them, or feel disempowered, fearful, hopeless. So here I would like to share some reflections about hope and hopeful action.

Much has been written about the power of hope, and opinion seems to be divided on its usefulness and value. Some see hope as something negative – leading to apathy and inertia. Some people point to having ‘false hopes’ as a means of making life bearable. However, this can also be extremely negative when false hopes are revealed as precisely that – false. I believe that there are many faces and levels of hope which are positive, effectively strengthening our resolve when times are tough or uncertainty is rife. Hope can be a motivating and revivifying force.

Here are some thoughts about hope.

### **Hope and Nurture**

Last year as part of my work, I was involved in a series of events bringing diverse interfaith and intercultural communities together to build hope and create positive actions through our Tree of Life Tour. The Tree of Life image served as a very good symbol for us, with its world-wide recognition, in religions and indigenous traditions, as representing a universal force which connects and nurtures us all. In the words of my Sufi colleague and friend Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, who was the main speaker on the tour, we must recognise that which connects us all, and nurture that within us that enables us to feel connected to others. Recognising our connection with others and what is good in life even in the face of the most difficult and dreadful conflict and circumstances brings stability, hope and steadfastness. Here is a photo of one of the Tree of Life images, with people’s leaves of hope, from one of our events.



Leaves include: LOVE, WE ARE ONE, I am Peace, I am Love, I love my Mum

The most frequently heard comments at our events were that people had felt nurtured and inspired to hope by them. Feeling nurtured helps people to overcome despair and re-engage with the critical issues of our time, and allows for changes in perception. The events highlighted the important link that when people feel nurtured, their sense of hope can be renewed, even in the most troublesome and wearying times.

### **Hope and the Arts**

I believe that the arts can bring great gifts into the arena of building a better future and peace-building. Not only can they nurture us, but they can reach parts of ourselves that have shut down in the face of the onslaughts of life, and encourage new growth, in the same way that feeding plants helps them to bloom and flourish.

### **Hope is not 'woolly'!**

The following poem, 'bare bones' by Ullie Kaye Poetry demonstrates that hope is not always (or ever!) soft and fluffy but that hope can be experienced as a quiet energy even in the most difficult of times.

hope is not always soft and lovely.  
she is not always cascading rivers  
and sunlit skies, dancing. hope knows  
there is work to be done. there are  
roads to be travelled. turns to be made.  
she is bare bones and deep waters.  
she is weary and weak. she is barely  
a glimmer. she shakes when she speaks.  
this is where hope lives. smothered in  
sweat. full of war. and on the verge  
of crumbling into the sea.  
yet there she is, quietly breathing.

### **Hope as Action**

*To be hopeful do hopeful things.* - Fr John Dear

*Hope is the faith that, together we can make things better.* - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Hope can be both a call to and the fuel for action. One aspect is described in the following quotation: *Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out* - Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (1986)

To read more about the different aspects of hope, including hope as heart, participatory hope, and the link with Living Spirituality Connections, go to:

<https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Many-Faces-of-Hope-in-Difficult-Times.pdf>

**Heather-Jane Ozanne** is CEO of Spirit of Peace <https://spiritofpeace.co.uk/> Within this charity, she is continuing to develop and deliver a training course – Pathways for Human Flourishing, centred around the wisdom of the heart and based on her work and experience in community and social work and her partnership with International peacebuilders.

Heather-Jane is also a retreat leader and facilitator; a member of the Core Living Spirituality Connections team, and a member of the Core Group of CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness). She co-authored with Janice Dolley, ***Voices of Contemporary Christians: Towards the Universal***. In 2025 she was awarded The Paul Harris Fellowship, Rotary International's highest recognition, honouring individuals (Rotarians or not) who significantly support Rotary's ideals, particularly "Service Above Self." The award signifies exceptional community service.

## HOPE in Dark Times

### News from Hope Flowers School, Bethlehem



*Children learning to be first responders at Hope Flowers School*

These are unprecedented times in Palestine, bringing severe hardship and trauma to every Palestinian in the West Bank as well as Gaza. Yet Hope Flowers School brings the gift of hope in these dark times. **Hope** for the well-being of **all** humanity. **Hope** in the belief that children are the carriers of new life in Palestine.

T. Bennigson of U.S. Friends of Hope Flowers School has written in October 2025:

“Hope Flowers School is filled with sweetness and good energy. It is inspiring! In a dismal situation, the school is living up to its name: creating a **Corner of Hope**. Most impressively, the children seemed happy and engaged, no small success given the trauma that surrounds them. The staff has succeeded in providing a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment.”

The above piece first appeared in the Spirit of Peace newsletter <https://spiritofpeace.co.uk/>  
Reproduced with thanks.

## The Genesis of a Labyrinth

By Linda Courage



Some time ago I was showing a friend, Julia Ling-MacDonald, around my home town of Selby which has a waterside garden. The entrance, flower beds and pathways include sculptures made by Ailsa Magnus, which tell the story of the town via three swans (an emblem of our town), a totem pole of the major industries of the past, and a paved timeline.

The time line begins at the opening of a large community amphitheatre with stepped seating. My friend looked at the space and exclaimed "labyrinth!". And so began a series of conversations to investigate the possibility of our becoming a town with a permanent labyrinth for visitors and locals to use.

Labyrinths are an ancient symbol that, unlike a maze, have only one way in and out - so you can't get lost! They help to connect us with ourselves and are used in all sorts of places like health care and education facilities, leadership venues, churches and retreat settings, stately homes, beaches, fields and gardens.

There are many ways of walking a labyrinth - you can walk it your own way, or some might like a little guidance, for example:

You might pause at the opening and try to slow down your thoughts - maybe take a few deep breaths. Walking slowly along the twists and turns, rest and gently notice what you notice and where your thoughts and senses go. Get to the middle and pause - is there anything you'd like to leave or let go of there, or maybe a realisation to take back on the path out with you?

Walk slowly back along the pathway out - does it feel different, do you feel different? Stop on the way if it feels right at any point. Enjoy any insights or sense of rest and peace.

Maybe pause at the exit as you prepare to leave the almost meditative space. Revisit it whenever you want or need to - maybe to air a problem or to just clear your mind at a break in your day.

To read about the way the Selby labyrinth came into being, and for links to Labyrinths in the UK and worldwide go to:

<https://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Genesis-of-a-Labyrinth.pdf>

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## Hope and Change through Song

**Rise up Singing** <https://www.riseupsinging.org/> is the website of [Annie Patterson & Peter Blood](#), the creators of [Rise Up Singing](#) & [Rise Again](#) songbooks. Their mission is to foster

hope and work for justice through song. You can hear many songs online through the website.

We conclude this newsletter with the first verse of one of the songs which is also on the website of <https://songsforthegreatturning.net/> **We Shall be Known** by [Karisha Longaker](#), whose website is <https://www.mamuse.org/>.

We shall be known by the company we keep  
By the ones who circle round to tend these fires.  
We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap  
The seeds of change, alive from deep within the earth.  
It is time now, it is time now that we thrive  
It is time we lead ourselves into the well.  
It is time now, and what a time to be alive.  
In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love  
In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love.

To hear this song go to: We Shall Be Known | Rise Up Singing sung by Thrive East Bay Choir  
<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=we%20shall%20be%20known%20mamuse&mid=E8BE61B698C03A030484E8BE61B698C03A030484&ajaxhist=0>