SOME DAYS IFEEL TRIANGLE

Exploring positive social action, health and wellbeing through art and photography

Gwen Riley Jones, Salford Youth Council & the University of Salford Art Collection





Salford Youth Council visit Allotment for Veterans, Tindall Street Allotments; (top of page). Salford Youth Council visit University of Salford Art Collection store (bottom left of page). Images by Gwen Riley Jones.

Salford Youth Council take photos at Deans Centre, Salford, (bottom right of page). Image by Leo.



" Sometimes it can be incredibly hard to put emotions into words because emotions are very abstract things by nature."

" I've genuinely said to someone I'm feeling very triangle today."

Harley

INTRODUCTION

Greater Manchester based artist Gwen Riley Jones joined the University of Salford Art Collection (UOSAC) in 2021 as socially-engaged photographer in residence. Selected through an open call. Gwen had an open brief to 'use the Collection as a catalyst to engage with younger local communities'. For over a year she worked closely with youth groups across Salford, particularly Salford Youth Council (SYC) to explore art, creativity and social action. Together they considered how art and visual culture impact our daily lives, and how they might be used to inspire change.

SYC are a group of 11-21 year olds who meet and work on 'positive social action' – campaigning to raise youth voice locally and nationally. With Gwen they raised and explored a number of priorities together: from health, wellbeing and the benefits of connecting with nature, to allyship, representation and positive selfexpression. They used the Collection as a starting point for conversations; and helped shape the way we think about collecting and curating. Some of the groups' stories and images were originally exhibited in the New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery at the University of Salford, from 1 February to 28 April 2023, under the title *Some Days I Feel Triangle*. The display also included favourite artworks from the University of Salford Art Collection which inspired their journey together – using art for 'thinking, talking, looking, sharing and debating'. Alongside, the exhibition included prompts, cards, badges, and stickers for visitors to take away; and a space to reflect and respond.

The artist in residence project was delivered by the University of Salford Art Collection in collaboration with Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, and with the support of Salford City Council's youth service. The project was a pilot model, and this publication gathers together some of the processes, stories and outcomes of residency – acting as both as a legacy of the project and, hopefully, a tool for future practice.



Install photo of Some Days I Feel Triangle gradient poster with stickers, visitors were invited to place a sticker on the colour they were feeling that day.

COLLECTION AS A CATALYST

At the University of Salford, we consider the 'collection as a catalyst' – an active and risktaking collection that sparks conversation and collaboration. We support artist development at all career levels, encourage cross-discipline research and activity, and acquire most of our new works through an ambitious 'commission to collect' model. We're often trying to test the edges of what a contemporary collection might be or do.

Gwen's pilot residency project fully embraced this ethos and helped us connect meaningfully with younger local residents in new ways. We knew we wanted to hear more from younger audiences, and started with some core questions about the relevance of collecting today: *Why do we collect? What do we collect? Who do we engage? and what voices, themes or stories might be missing?*

The project started at a significant time: in 2021 we moved our entire collection to a new purpose-designed space on campus.

This space brought all of our artworks and associated archives together for the first time and, importantly, included a new study room where we could welcome visitors directly to the stores. Gwen had open access to the entire collection, and Salford Youth Council were our first official visitors.

Together, through the residency, we thought about the future of both our collection and the local community; what hopes, values and ambitions we might share, and what role art, visual culture and creativity can play. Recurring priorities included: positive social change, diversity and representation, and wellbeing, health, and nature.

We considered the role of art in connecting with climate issues (e.g. in Mishka Henner's digital print of oil fields); the importance of LGBTQ+ allyship (e.g. in our queer alumni exhibition featuring Jesse Glazzard, Sadé Mica, SHARP and Mollie Balshaw); discussions of body image and wellbeing (in Hazel Rebecca Clegg's oil self-portraits) alongside the simple, sheer pleasure of looking at art for enjoyment (in Kip Gresham's vibrant series of prints).

Our sessions brought new interpretation and context to the works in our Collection and, in early 2023, just over a year after first visiting us, Salford Youth Council took over our campus gallery space to co-curate a new exhibition. *Some Days I Feel Triangle* included selected works from the collection as well as photography, documentation, stickers, captions, video and more from the programme. A highlight includes the **Photowalk for Wellbeing** – a free activity devised by the group to help people spend time in nature.

Gwen's residency extended further than the Collection and SYC, working with young environmentalists Action for Conservation on a new display at RHS Garden Bridgewater; engaging with students on the Sustaining Photography project; contributing to the University's Socially Engaged Practice and photography programmes; and further work and consultation on our wider programming.

The following pages share some of the groups' favourite works from the Collection, profile Salford Youth Council and their campaigns further, and reflect on the learning and further outcomes from the project. We are grateful to all the youth group members and our key partners for an insightful, and impactful residency.

Stephanie Fletcher

Assistant Curator

A note on the title: Some Days I Feel Triangle combines artwork title 'Some Days' by Wang Ningde, and a provocation from one of the group sessions (I'm feeling very triangle today) – pointing to the difficulty (or perhaps joy) of trying to translate abstract thoughts and emotions into universal language.



'This reminds me that society can make people's body image worse. This can be through magazine covers with perfect Photoshop bodies or people online commenting on other people's bodies

It reminds me that comments over time can lead to a person hurting themselves to become and fit into society's body, which is sad because everybody is perfect no matter what.'

Amber

Hazel Rebecca Clegg, *Untitled E*, acrylic on canvas, 2015. Image courtesy the artist.



Wang Ningde, Some Days No.3, photograph, 2002. Courtesy the artist and Michael Goedhuis.

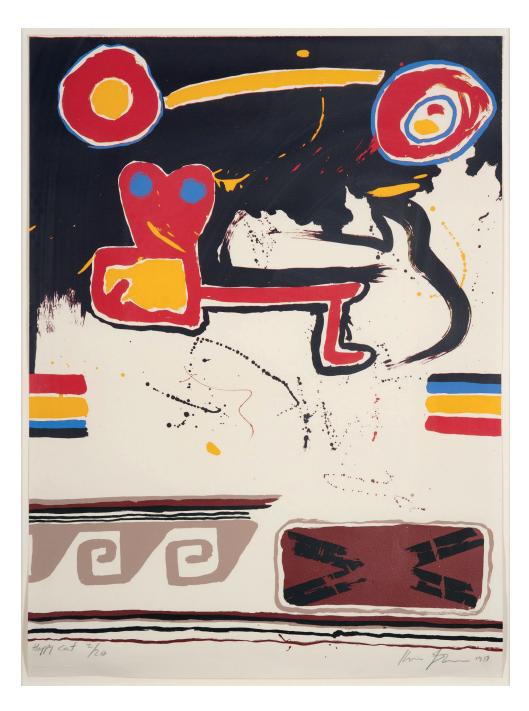


'This made me imagine a society where birds are like people. What would their culture be like? Would they use money? What movies would they watch? Would they insult people by calling them human brained?'

Harley

Han Feng, *Shoe For Bird*, mixed media sculpture, 2012. Image courtesy the artist and Art UK. 'Happy Cat made me question where is the cat? What is the cat? Why is the cat happy? Am I happy, like the cat?'

Amber



Happy cat

SALFORD YOUTH COUNCIL

We are a group of young people promoting the beliefs and representing the views and values of all the youth of Salford. We conduct a survey each year called *Make Your Mark*. This helps us assess the issues important to young people, giving everyone aged between 11-18 a voice to express their concerns and make a positive impact within Salford.

As a group, we campaign on issues that matter to young people and work to improve their image in the local community. We take on projects to improve awareness across issues suggested by the young people through the *Make Your Mark* surveys.

One of our recent projects was producing antihate crime resources for schools. These include a map which illustrates how multicultural and diverse Salford is, and how we can notice and appreciate that in our day to day lives. We also took part in the city's annual Holocaust Memorial day. One of our most important projects was creating opportunities to help young people to look after their mental wellbeing, a highly suggested topic from young people in Salford. Salford Youth Council is a member of the UK Youth Parliament. We have two Members of Youth Parliament (M.Y.Ps) who represent young people at regional and national meetings (this ensures that young people in the UK are given a voice on issues that affect them and provides the opportunity to be involved in the democratic process at a national level). We also have the Young Mayor of Salford who is elected by local young people every 2 years.

The Young Mayor represents young people at a local level. In addition, we are a member of the North-West of England regional group 'Youthforia' and the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority (GMYCA), which gives young people the opportunity to have their voices heard across Greater Manchester.



Some Days I Feel Triangle

exhibition install shot, a video shows the current M.Y.P Harley Smith, speaking in the Houses of Parliament on issues of mental health support for young people, in November 2022.

WHAT WE DID TOGETHER BY GWEN RILEY JONES

In late 2021 I met the Youth Council for the first time and was struck and inspired by their intelligence, their respect for each other and their ability to articulate the issues affecting young people and take action. The group actively run campaigns on the issues most important to young people, leading me to ask, could art play a role in their work in some way?

We started with conversation, talking, thinking, drawing, writing and listening. We asked **'What is not art?**' as a way of defining what art can and could be.

Chinaleigh said 'everything in the world could be art in its own way'.

Alex said 'absence of anything is art, if someone can find some kind of meaning to it or feels something then it's probably art.'

I asked: if anything can be art, how do you decide what is good and bad art?

'If you want to reach as many people as possible, the people deciding should be a group with totally different interests and stuff'.

'You need a variety of people deciding, unless there is a theme'.

As we worked together, Chinaleigh drew a striking graphic of the word ART during our conversation, and we decided to make it into a sticker. Unexpectedly, stickers became an important tool in the work we did together, using them as a method of engagement, to make people feel empowered and heard.

In later sessions we explored the newly digitised, online art collection catalogue. The group selected artworks to see on their visit to the collection. Their selections led to deep conversations about gender politics, sexuality and identity. We had philosophical conversations about emotions, world views, and mental health; some of which led to the title of the exhibition, captions of artwork used in the exhibition, and are included throughout this booklet.

My approach was to listen to what the group was working on and explore ways of using art to support their campaigns. As we reflected on the projects we did together, there were strong themes of mental health, wellbeing and social action running across each project. Here we sum up 3 case studies which connect to these themes.



Salford Youth Council exploring What is art?, writing thoughts on our conversation scroll (top left), image of section of conversation scroll (top right). Salford Youth Council creating Photowalk for Wellbeing, writing prompts to images and designing the layout of the cards (bottom).



HEALTH AND HELPING

During the summer of 2022 Salford Youth Council successfully bid for funding to carry out a project to tackle obesity. The project took a holistic view, including cooking competitions, trying out obesity suits and helping out at the Allotment for Veterans over the summer holidays. At the allotment the group got active and spent time outside; learned how to grow plants and helped out with practical jobs. The project was good for wellbeing, physical and mental health.

During our time at the allotment, we used photography to connect with plants, nature and each other. The group spent time taking photographs of nature, exploring their surroundings and having fun. The photographs taken by the group were shared with the allotment to help with funding bids and to share in their newsletter. Following this experience, the Youth Council have begun to look for a site to set up a growing space.

Vinny, from the Allotment for Veterans says, 'Our aim is to get people out of isolation and for those who have no growing space to come and join in our allotment. This encourages their health and wellbeing, improves their mental health, and allows people to make new friends.'

If you'd like to know more about Allotment for Veterans, contact Vincent Nield on **afveterans.group@gmail.com**

Pea plants at Allotment for Veterans; image by Paaniz. Portrait of Harley (left) and of Paaniz (right) at Allotment for Veterans; images by Gwen Riley Jones.





LIFT EVERY VOICE

Each year Salford CVS and Salford City Council host the *Seldom Heard* event - an opportunity for city leaders to hear directly from groups of young people about the issues most important to them. The event is co-organised and cohosted by Salford Youth Council. In 2022, Gwen collaborated with Salford Youth Council to prepare for and record the event.

City leaders heard from a range of people from groups across Salford, including Warm Hut UK, The Sebene Project, Bridgewater Youth LGBTQ+ group, DIY Theatre, Stepping Stone Creative and The Flowhesion Foundation.

Young people make direct requests to city leaders for change they would like to see. Rebecca Ghola, from Warm Hut UK, requested for there to be better information and education of Pre-colonial Africa. 'We think that a better education and understanding of Africa and African people will change the way others look at us. It can help decrease racism and ignorance against African people. We strongly believe that schools in the UK should include the pre-colonial history of Africa. We also think that we should start educating on black inventors and scientists.'

Warm Hut UK is a charity based in Salford offering practical support to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

As well as hosting and photographing the event, the Youth Council designed stickers that attendees could take away with them – to help them feel empowered and remember that they are heard.



Clouds in the sky outside Seldom Heard event; image by Tiffany (above left).

Rebecca Ghola from Warm Hut UK requesting better information and education of Pre-colonial Africa at Seldom Heard event; image by Gwen Riley Jones (above right). *I am heard!* sticker created by SYC for participants of the Seldom Heard event; image by Lesley (bottom right).



Photowalk for Wellbeing in action in Peel Park as part of Welcome Week, University of Salford, 2022; image by Gwen Riley Jones.

PHOTOWALK FOR WELLBEING

In the national *Make Your Mark* ballot 2022, wellbeing was voted the most important issue for young people in the UK. The Members of Young Parliament for Salford carried out wellbeing focus groups to explore the young people's thoughts on wellbeing and mental health services.

This inspired the group to take action and create a tool to help others with their wellbeing. The group selected photos they had taken in workshop sessions and wrote prompts to inspire others to take action; from noticing your surroundings to finding inspiration in nature to grow your own happiness. The prompts are presented as numbered cards, easy to carry in your pocket to use whenever suits you. The cards were also designed by the group, taking care to be inclusive, the design was informed by the access needs of those living with dyslexia.

The *Photowalk for Wellbeing* was created by and for the Youth Council and has been shared with 7 other Youth Councils across the Northwest, as well as groups of students and staff at University of Salford during Welcome Week and the *LOOK Photo Biennial 2022*.

You can download a set of digital cards here:





Go cloud watching.

Your own happiness can reach the sky.

Look up and take a photo of the sky.



Grow in your own happiness.

Take a picture in nature that makes you feel happy.



Pink is the colour of love.

Photograph something that you love.



Branch out of your comfort zone.

Take a photo from an unusual angle.



Don't let anything get in your way.

Take a photo to represent overcoming challenges.



Go on a forest walk.

Watch leaves fall.



Work as a team.

Trust someone to take a photo of you.

Pose however you feel confident.



Aim high.

Take a photo to celebrate your success.

Selections of cards from the *Photowalk for Wellbeing*; images courtesy of Salford Youth Council and Gwen Riley Jones.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

Understanding the difference this project has made to people involved is an important part of the project's aims. We undertook extensive evaluation in different ways. It was important to hear the impact this work had had on the young people, visitors to the exhibition and the art collection team itself. Evaluation took different forms including sharing sessions, written feedback and reflection.

I asked the Youth Council: Has this project changed how you think or feel about art?

'I now think about art more, I am more passionate about art. Before I didn't care about art, now I have a deeper understanding about it. It has opened my eyes to the importance of art in the modern world and its impact on society, alongside the emotions it invokes in you.'

What did you enjoy most about the project?

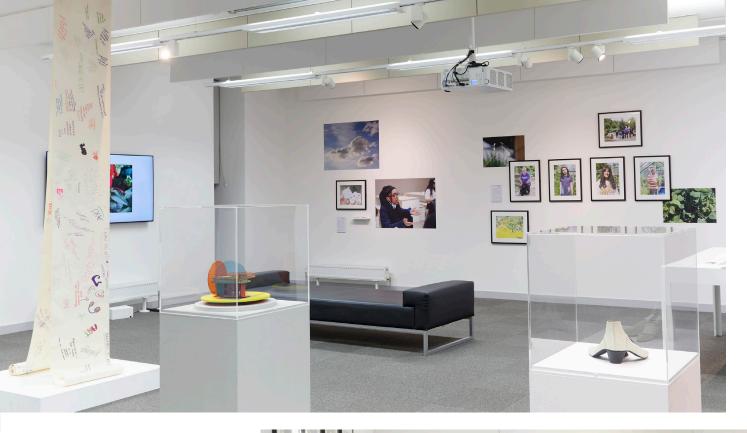
'Positioning the photos when setting up the exhibition, telling people which piece was my artwork. I liked exploring the different art works and their meanings.' 'I enjoyed taking the photos, taking part in the wellbeing walk cards. I liked sounding incredibly insightful. I like Gwen. I liked seeing something I made being turned into something professional and finished (Triangle man).'

During evaluation with the Art Collection team, they shared:

'Maybe this project makes us think about engagement in a different way – maybe engagement happens before a show – rather than after.'

'A good reminder that art can play a really important function in everyone's lives – not just art students.'

And feedback from exhibition visitors included: "When I'm feeling stressed, I like to come here to calm down and reflect on life and see the incredible art people have created. *Untitled-E* moved me on such a personal level that I immediately told my friends and family about it. Both the humorous and serious art are incredibly effective. It made me go from rhombus to circle. Thank you" - Student at Media City.



Install photograph of *Some Days I Feel Triangle* in New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery; image by Gwen Riley Jones (above right).

Salford Youth Council holding a group meeting in the New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery during the *Some Days I Feel Triangle* exhibition, image by Gwen Riley Jones (bottom right).



FURTHER WORK PLANTING FOR THE PLANET

In 2019, the British Youth Council declared the climate emergency the 'biggest issue facing young people'. Throughout her residency with the Collection, the environment and combating the climate crisis became a key focus of Gwen's work with young people across Salford.

In 2021, Gwen connected with IGNITION, an EU-funded project bringing together local government, universities, environmental organisations, businesses and the local community to find new ways of using plants and nature to protect communities from increased rainfall, flooding and heatwaves.

The RHS was one of 12 organisations in the IGNITION partnership alongside the University of Salford, with RHS Science providing the latest plant research and expertise to help develop a cutting-edge living laboratory at the University.

Over the course of the 3-year IGNITION project, RHS Communities, worked on outreach and education, teaming up with local community, youth and school groups from across Greater Manchester to support climate action. Young people have been integral to raising the profile of the climate emergency and creating positive social action and working with RHS Communities, Gwen connected with local youth environment charity Action for Conservation to explore the role art can play in combating the climate crisis, and plant-based methods of creating artwork.

Action for Conservation works to bring the magic of nature into young people's lives, inspiring a youth movement committed to conservation and the earth; empowering young people aged 12-18 to become the next generation of environmental leaders. Gwen worked closely with young people from Action for Conservation, developing artwork using a range of plant-based methods of photography.

Their work together culminated in *Planting for the Planet*, an exhibition at RHS Bridgewater, celebrating IGNITION and the communities' contributions to learning and demonstrating the importance of plants and nature in creating resilient, healthy and beautiful spaces for people and the planet to coexist.

The artworks exhibited in *Planting for the Planet* were anthotypes; a method of creating photographs using nothing but juice extracted from spinach leaves, created by Angélica, Hannah, Charis, Daniel, LiLing, Mariam, Muhammed, Olivia, and Tamar. These creations demonstrate the essential relationship between people and plants to create climate resilient communities. The works were exhibited alongside quotes from the group with their thoughts on ways art can help to tackle the climate crisis.

Works from this exhibition have gone on to be exhibited as part of LOOK Photo Biennial, Liverpool and Photo Fringe in the Open Eco exhibition on Worthing seafront.

The sustainable photographic methods used in this project have inspired and are being developed by the Sustaining Photography project; a collaboration between Lizzie King & Gwen Riley Jones, funded by the Salford Advantage Fund and The University of Salford Art Collection. 'I think art can help us solve the climate crisis as it can raise awareness and give people a boost to make a change to their actions and help the earth. Nature can make us more resilient to the effects of climate change as it can help us to prepare for natural disasters.'

Daniel

Daniel, 'Planting for the Planet', anthotype portrait co-created by Daniel, Gwen Riley Jones, and a group of young people from Action for Conservation in collaboration with RHS Communities and University of Salford Art Collection.



FURTHER WORK SUSTAINING PHOTOGRAPHY

Sustaining Photography is a project to connect and engage students with sustainable photographic processes, using produce from the campus Community Growing Space.

Traditional photographic methods use chemicals that create toxic waste. This project instead aims to share and develop new methods using organic, plant-based, plants and produce, or recycled materials. This is done through a series of workshops, talks, and an exhibition. The project connects students to industry and onward career pathways through lectures by sector-leading practitioners.

This work supports the University's ongoing work and reputation for Green Impact, as well as meeting student demand for more ecofriendly skills; building on the Go Green Salford events, as well as the success of the Community Allotment (funded by Salford Advantage Fund in 2019).

Artists Lizzie King (student, MA Contemporary Fine Art) and Gwen Riley Jones collaborate to create photographic artworks using materials grown in the allotment and exhibited on campus.

This project is made possible by the donorfunded Salford Advantage Fund and University of Salford Art Collection.

For more information visit: **artcollection.salford. ac.uk/sustaining-photography**

Lizzie King and Gwen Riley Jones, *Sustaining Photography 001*, layered photograph, 2023. Image courtesy of Lizzie King and Gwen Riley Jones.





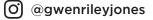
Supported by Salford Advantage Fund Grants Enhancing the Salford experience

ABOUT US GWEN RILEY JONES

Gwen Riley Jones is a photographer and socially engaged practitioner based in Greater Manchester. With a professional background working with cultural heritage collections, her personal practice explores themes of identity and environment, through place and belonging.

As Socially Engaged Photographer in Residence at the University of Salford in partnership with Open Eye Gallery, Gwen worked with groups of young people across Salford to explore how collections can be used and understood to help us tell stories. Following her residency, Gwen was appointed on the *Our Time Our Place* engagement programme, part of the North West exhibition tour of work by award-winning photographer and alumnus Craig Easton in 2023-2024. The programme, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, took inspiration from the themes of Easton's work, engaging with young people and recent graduates to make new work on issues of place, heritage and identity. Read more about the projects at: **artcollection.salford. ac.uk/craig-easton-is-anybody-listening-ourtime-our-place.**

www.gwenrileyjones.com





Gwen Riley Jones at Deans Centre, Salford on a photowalk with Salford Youth Council. Image by Zukruf

ABOUT US PROJECT PARTNERS

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD ART COLLECTION:

The University of Salford Art Collection contains around 900 works of modern and contemporary art, and exists for the benefit of students, staff, and the public. The Collection is displayed across campus as well as through loans to other arts organisations and museums, and is actively developed through a 'commission to collect' model, often with key partners and collaborators.

artcollection.salford.ac.uk

The Collection is being digitised on an ongoing basis, and can be browsed online at:

artcollection-catalogue.salford.ac.uk

OPEN EYE GALLERY:

Open Eye Gallery is a photography organisation based in Liverpool, UK, working worldwide.

They produce exhibitions, long-term collaborative projects, publications, festivals, and university courses - locally and worldwide. They take a lead on socially engaged photography nationally.

openeye.org.uk

SALFORD YOUTH COUNCIL:

Salford Youth Council is a youth voice group for anyone aged 11-21 who lives, educated or works in Salford.

We meet on a weekly basis, to plan events, work on campaigns, and promote positive stories of young people in Salford.

We are the home of the Young Mayor and Member of Youth Parliament for Salford.

Find out more Email martyn.shaw@salford.gov.uk Call 07872416964

CREDITS

List of images:

Cover: Colour gradient used as welcome poster in gallery exhibition, visitors were invited to stick a sticker on the colour they were feeling that day. Image by Gwen Riley Jones.

Inside Cover: Salford Youth Council visit Allotment for Veterans, Tindall Street Allotments. Image by Gwen Riley Jones (top of page).

Salford Youth Council visit University of Salford Art Collection store. Image by Gwen Riley Jones (bottom left of page).

Salford Youth Council take photos at Deans Centre, Salford. Image by Leo (bottom right of page).

Page 3: Install photo of *Some Days I Feel Triangle* gradient poster with stickers, visitors were invited to place a sticker on the colour they were feeling that day. Image by Gwen Riley Jones.

Page 6: Hazel Rebecca Clegg, *Untitled E*, acrylic on canvas, 2015. Image courtesy the artist.

Page 7: Wang Ningde, *Some Days No.3*, photograph, 2002. Courtesy the artist and Michael Goedhuis.

Page 8: Han Feng, *Shoe For Bird*, mixed media sculpture, 2012. Image courtesy the artist and Art UK.

Page 9: *Kip Gresham, Happy Cat,* 1981. Image courtesy of the artist

Page 11: Some Days I Feel Triangle exhibition install shot, a video shows the current M.Y.P Harley Smith, speaking in the Houses of Parliament on issues of mental health support for young people, in November 2022. Image by Gwen Riley Jones.

Page 13: Salford Youth Council exploring What is art?, writing thoughts on our conversation scroll (top left), image of section of conversation scroll (top right). Salford Youth Council creating Photowalk for Wellbeing, writing prompts to images and designing the layout of the cards (bottom). Images by Gwen Riley Jones.

Page 15: Pea plants at Allotment for Veterans. Image by Paaniz. Portrait of Harley (left) and of Paaniz (right) at Allotment for Veterans. Image by Gwen Riley Jones.

Page 16: Clouds in the sky outside Seldom Heard event. Image by Tiffany.

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Page 20 and 21: Selections of the cards from the *Photowalk for Wellbeing*. Image courtesy of Salford Youth Council.

Page 23: Install photography of *Some Days I Feel Triangle* in New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery. Image by Gwen Riley Jones (top of page).

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Page 25: Daniel, 'Planting for the Planet', anthotype portrait co-created by Daniel, Gwen Riley Jones and a group of young people from Action for Conservation in collaboration with RHS Communities and University of Salford Art Collection.

Page 26: Lizzie King and Gwen Riley Jones, *Sustaining Photography 001*, layered photograph, 2023. Image courtesy of Lizzie King and Gwen Riley Jones.

Page 27: Gwen Riley Jones at Deans Centre, Salford on a photowalk with Salford Youth Council. Image by Zukruf.





