Huddlecraft

A field guide to pollinating peer groups

3 Years of Enrol Yourself
2017 - 2020
Dear Reader,

You are looking at a labour of love. Part yearbook, part manifesto, part impact report. We hope it is a treat for your eyes and a tasty morsel for your mind.

This book is both a thank you to everyone who has been part of Enrol Yourself over the last 3 years, and a lure to others: an invitation to participate, collaborate and join forces. It’s a collection in two parts: the first, a tool for navigating into a future that feels oh-so uncertain, the second a celebration of what we’ve learnt so far.

It’s also a talking piece so do tell us what you think.

Enjoy.

[Signature]
Part 1:

Where are we? Where are we going next?

In this section, we look at the ripples we have made, navigate to our North Star and glimpse into our future.
Finite planet, infinite potential to learn.

3 years of Enrol Yourself

Iacob and I co-founded Enrol Yourself because it seemed to us that lifelong learning was a bit rotten. Expensive to the point of exclusionary (not affordable for the majority), functional to the point of soullessness (focused narrowly on marketable skills), and passive to the point of consumerism (delivered as information to individually consume).

Enrol Yourself began as a creative and defiant response to the rot. Peer groups were a pragmatic idea with the potential to reduce costs, engage people more deeply, and serve a purpose whilst being social and dynamic.

More than 3 years down the line, and peer groups are the heart of what we do. They are spaces for learning, but also for unlearning, changing behaviour, taking action, healing and more. We’ve learnt about what makes peer groups effective by doing them! Lots of them. The road has been bumpy, and very rewarding.

What have we discovered?

1. Peer groups wield power.

Peer groups allow individuals to tackle steep learning curves in community. When a peer group connects and learns together for 6 months, they boost their collective sense of purpose, their network of relationships, their capabilities and their wellbeing. We’ve also found that individuals become pollinators of peer-led values, principles and practices, which they apply to their relationships, their work and to what they create.

2. Craft is required to unlock this power.

When we started we thought that finding people to commit to joining a peer group would be the hardest bit. Now we know this is just the tip of the iceberg. Peer groups are inherently more complex than a two-way teacher-student dynamic. Therein lies the potential, but craft is required to unlock it. We’ve learnt that inclusion and equity underpin this craft. Without them, we may only perpetuate the rotten system that we want to leave behind.

Peer groups and post-growth

In his latest book, sustainability campaigner and author Jonathon Porritt writes that we’re not yet out of time to prevent a runaway climate disaster - but we soon will be. His warning echoed an article published in January 2020 by 11,000 scientists around the world, which called on governments to shift toward ‘post-growth’ economic models, focusing on human wellbeing and ecological stability rather than constant expansion. We are part of this post-growth movement.

The numbers, words and images in this book describe the impact of our peer groups for individuals, how the effects ripple out from there, and offer just a glimpse of what it could mean to seed peer groups across our society.

We want to continue to deepen what we offer, and we’re curious about how our model might be applied in ways we haven’t yet imagined.

We believe it is possible for people to re-learn how we live, and our work is a vote for a future that can support the lives of our children, grandchildren and beyond. Peer groups have potential to help people scale the steep learning curves that stand between us and that future. Our role is unfolding that potential.

Navigating into an uncertain future

COVID-19 gave us a taste of what radical disruption feels like, and as a small organisation, reminded us of our mortality, and the futility of developing detailed 3, 5 or 10 year plans.

The next decade feels highly charged. We’ll be channelling this anxious energy by following our North Star (fig. 1). We’ve developed a compass (pages 10 – 11) to help us navigate towards it with an attitude of continual reorientation.

We hope this will serve us better than a plan in uncertain times to come. And in the spirit of resilience, we won’t be relying on any singular activity to keep us afloat.

We also plan to do some long-term ‘cathedral’ thinking, exploring what it might mean to build something beyond the lifetime of any of us currently involved. Looking ahead to the next century feels faintly ridiculous, but perhaps that’s the appeal. We need to be responsive and adaptable, but maybe we need a durational counterbalance to keep us anchored. Perhaps the need for Enrol Yourself will expire, perhaps we won’t survive the adversity that’s coming.

Let’s see what happens!
**Ripples:**

Enrol Yourself in numbers

After 3 years and 14 Learning Marathons in total, what have we learned about the impact the process can have?

**Overview**

- **14** Learning Marathons
- **8** trained Hosts (2 were previous participants)
- **130** participants
- **94%** would enrol again
- **8%** participants re-enrolled so far

**Impact:**

**Participant Projects**

The average participant’s project reaches:

- **2** people in their inner circle
- **9** people in their team or daily life
- **128** people they haven’t met before
- **3348** ‘passive’ online viewers

**Impact:**

**Capabilities and Wellbeing**

The average Learning Marathon participant records the following percentage increases after taking part in the Learning Marathon:

- I feel useful, worthwhile and purposeful
- I feel supported and invested in by others
- I am satisfied with my professional effectiveness
- I am learning and developing
- I feel able to direct my own learning
- I feel creative

**Who has enrolled?**

We’re working hard to ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the Learning Marathon can, regardless of background or identity.

Learn more on page 36.

**Impact:**

**Relationships**

The average Learning Marathon participant develops the following relationships:

- **9** friendships
- **7** collaborators
- **3** new paying clients (freelancers only)

After 3 years and 14 Learning Marathons in total, what have we learned about the impact the process can have?
The Ripple Effect
How peer-led values and practices spread after the Learning Marathon

1.0 Context
On page 5, we describe how individuals become ‘pollinators’ for peer-led approaches, and the ripple effect that ensues. Here we look in depth at the ways in which peer-led learning impacts the individual, relationships and society.

2.0 Impact on Learning Marathon participants

2.1 Adoption of peer-led values
In a recent survey, when asked if they had applied peer-led principles in their life or work after the Learning Marathon, participants responded:

Note: no previous participants said they had not, or would not use peer-led principles in their wider lives.

2.2 Types of pollination
Learning Marathon participants cited their application of peer-led practices in a variety of situations, including:

• I have applied them to my professional work
• I use them in my relationships with others
• I have created a new community, or applied them in an existing community
• I use them in my relationship with myself
• I am using them to raise my child

3.0 Examples
Further examples of how Learning Marathon participants have applied peer-led approaches are shown in the project boxes in the diagram.
A compass to guide us

As uncertainty grows, precise plans feel increasingly futile.

We’ve developed a compass to help us navigate towards our North Star, and away from murky waters.

The compass was developed by Enrol Yourself Hosts who came together during the COVID-19 lockdown to reflect on 3 years of Enrol Yourself and imagine what the future might hold.
Glimpsing the future
A taste of where we might go next

Our Host Fellowship kicks off and we continue to grow a collective of talented hosts, some of whom also work on our partnerships.

We develop our Inclusion Fund, possibly crowdfunding to create an ‘abundance package’ to promote equitable access to the benefits of peer groups.

A growing core team working on Enrol Yourself, as well as our collective of freelance hosts.

We continue to weave relationships with individuals and organisations, in support of our community and aims.

Proving the health benefits and/or financial savings of peer group ecosystems at scale.

A physical space or venue, a home for us, a meeting place for our community?

More men are participating in peer groups alongside women.

Could we dare to imagine 10,000 peer groups? 1M people impacted?

Supporting an international ecosystem of peer groups.

Become a B Corp? A co-op? Set up a non profit subsidiary?

Providing more open source resources, sharing more learning, exploring breadth as well as depth of offerings.

Prototyping aspects of digital technology that can support our North Star.

A taste of where we might go next.
Where have we been? What have we learnt?

In this section, we celebrate the Learning Marathon, our Hosts and all our participants.
The Learning Marathon
Our proven process for peer-led learning

1.0 Overview
The Learning Marathon is a 6-month structure for peer-led learning that can be adapted for different contexts.

At its heart, the Learning Marathon is a collective journey that connects, supports and fuels a group of people as they grow themselves, together.

2.0 Programme Design
The Learning Marathon is facilitated by a Host, and is designed to initiate a learning community who pool skills, resources and momentum to multiply the whole group’s development.

The programme kicks off with an intensive weekend of coach training, skills and network mapping, co-designing the journey and getting to know eachother.

From evening meet ups to Power Up days, the next 6 months are designed to maximise the collective potential of the peer group.

The journey ends with a Showcase event, designed by the group to shine a spotlight on their learning.

3.0 The Learning Larder
As we’ve run the Learning Marathon, we’ve built up a ‘larder’, stocked with a range of learning and development ‘ingredients’, some created by us, some borrowed from others, to help Hosts and participants cook up a great learning experience.

A few key items are illustrated here.

4.0 Outcomes
130 people have now participated in the Learning Marathon in London, Birmingham, Bristol and online. You can learn more about the Learning Marathon’s impact on pages 6 – 9, and by reading the numerous participant features in this section.
How to find your Learning Question

A Learning Question is a bit like a thesis question, without the enormous essay. All Learning Marathon participants have a Learning Question that frames a personal, professional or societal challenge they want to tackle alongside their peers. The right question should frame your goals, challenges or curiosities as an active site for exploration and response. It should be an itch you feel compelled to scratch.

I love it!

Not the one...

Step 1: Make lists
- Things you’re interested in
- Life goals and professional goals
- Things you want to do, make or start up
- Things you would like to see change in our society
- Things you care most about in the world
- Things you’d like to be remembered for

I already knew my question

I have so many ideas I’m drawing a blank but I’m keen

I don’t want one right now

Step 2: Analyse lists
- Ask yourself why you’ve written the things you’ve written
- List the skills and/or capabilities you would need to do any of the above
- Pull out key words and themes from across your lists
- Now highlight everything that is most important or urgent now

GO!

Step 3: Generate a question

How might...

I we see society community trees

Help find, make learn change create explore

your words here

that is what is it? if it

your words here

I love it!

I don’t want one.

Which category are you?

I already knew my question

I have so many ideas I’m drawing a blank but I’m keen

I don’t want one right now

GO!

I don’t have one...

I’m not sure...

I already have one...

I don’t want one right now

I want one now

Kim’s Learning Question:

How can I best serve the anti-slavery movement whilst being a successful mother and also earning a living?

Name: Kimberly Prado
Learning Marathon: Bristol, 2019

Kim formed Houria CIC as a result of her Learning Question. She incubated the project during the programme and launched at the Showcase with a canape buffet.

“The ultimate vision is a world without slavery. The mission is to provide a sisterhood and safe employment to women survivors of slavery in the form of a Pan African Catering company based in Bristol.”

www.houria.co.uk

“Houria means liberation and that’s what the company is all about.”
In this piece I seek to set out the particular power of small, purposeful groups of peers. It’s important to recognise that most of what I’m writing about has ancient roots that extend back beyond historical records, and is also recognised by modern science, which can show that difficult shifts really are easier with the support of trusted relationships. Jim Coan, Director of the Virginia Affective Neuroscience Laboratory, has produced empirical findings that show that when people are by themselves looking up at a hill, they see the hill as steeper than it actually is. This is for a good evolutionary reason: their brain is trying to ‘talk them out of it’, because it will cost them valuable resources. If a trusted friend shows up and stands with them, the hill corrects itself in terms of how they perceive its steepness.

Within the frame of metabolic resources this is surprising. What’s happening is that the friend’s presence alters their perception, and as a result changes the way their brain budgets resources. With company, the brain assumes they have more, even though in material terms, they don’t. My takeaway is that we can literally alter our perception of challenging things by surrounding ourselves with the right kind of relationships.

Huddlecraft: The art and craft of hosting and/or participating in a peer group.

Peer group: A small group of no more than 12 people, supporting one another to intentionally Shift something. A peer group might also be called a ‘huddle’ or a ‘micro-community’. Members of a peer group commit to supporting each other for the duration of the Journey.

Shift: This will mean something different for each peer group, and for each individual. The focus might be learning, unlearning, grappling with big questions, changing behaviour, healing, creating, thriving, the list goes on.

Journey: Members of a peer group agree to a period of time over which they will work together through a series of meetings, activities and/or shared responsibilities that will help them to Shift. The journey might be repeated or extended, and in most cases some of the relationships will outlive the journey.

Host: An important role for effective peer groups, which might be held largely by one person, shared or rotated around the members. The Host is not a teacher or leader, but a guide, there to help the group stick together and navigate their resources.

An example from a different field can aptly illustrate why size matters. The Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project was a complex of residential towers that opened in the 50s, and is a famous failure in the history of American public housing.

The complex featured 33 towers, each of which housed 100 families. Every building had an open first floor for community activity, including shared laundry facilities and common rooms.

A year after opening there was 90% occupancy, but by 1971 this had dropped to 35%. Although the remaining families kept their own apartments (and balconies they shared with one other family) clean and tidy, half the units were vandalised, the common areas were destroyed, and levels of violent crime were high.

Significantly, the housing project next door, with the same demographics, remained fully occupied and safe. Structurally this estate was very different. There were rows of just a few houses around a shared semi-private outdoor area. The few families in each segment could identify each other as neighbours and friends.

This is a great lens for thinking about group size. The residents in the large complex weren’t able to form the relationships that would have allowed them to govern, manage and use the common spaces.

In groups of 12 or less, your participation (or lack of) makes an impact. If you don’t contribute, everyone will miss out – and everyone will know. You can play a role in shaping the culture, purpose and practices of the group, and therefore you can feel genuinely invested and needed.

There are many ingredients that contribute to the formation of an effective peer group. Here are 3.
2) Timeframe

The Journey needs an end-date. This is because, cognitively, it is more manageable to commit to supporting other humans (in addition to partners, families and friends) when you know there’s an end in sight. To return to the neuroscience, it is difficult for your brain to budget the resources involved in climbing the hill if you can’t even see the top. You would need monumentally high motivation to get started.

The end-date is also important for setting the relationships up in the right way. It’s important that the expectation is not that the relationships should last forever.

This allows members of a peer group to relate in a more functional and purposeful way than they might with old friends, whilst also reducing pressure. This actually creates conditions within which warmth, trust - and new friendships - can develop.

Since 2018 Enrol Yourself has been working with Friends of the Earth to launch and develop Own It, a peer support network for women taking climate action through their personal finance.

Essentially, this is a network of women supporting each other to take actions like: divesting their pensions from fossil fuels; switching to more ethical banks; or spending more locally.

Women are trained as volunteer Hosts. They initiate a peer group and host a mini-programme of 3 meetups.

It’s easy for the brain to budget resources to Own It. You can see the top of the hill you’re climbing (the end-date), you climb it with a small group of peers and you can see the impact you’ll have had by the time you get to the top. This makes it easy on the brain when it’s doing its calculations.

3) Structure

Lastly, it’s important that peer groups are circular in ‘shape’. This means that, to the best of the ability of the participants, the group is a non-hierarchical and equitable space.

It means there is shared responsibility: all participants are peers, even when one or more of them take on the role of Host.

An expert could gather 8 students to teach them how to be experts too. From the outside this will look like a peer group. But it isn’t. It’s not circular. It just happens to be of a similar size. This is a vehicle for knowledge transfer rather than one of mutual support and co-discovery.

A peer group is full of people so the circle will always be imperfect. Always. Without exception. But the intention and the work involved in trying is what matters.

These ideas are ancient and can be found in all traditions, notably within Native American culture. They thought of all people as mirrors for all other people to look into. Thus, by sitting in a circle with other people, you can see yourself reflected from multiple perspectives all at once. They recognised that the power of this ‘learning technology’ (they didn’t call it that) came, at least in part, from its circular shape.

“During my time on the Marathon I finalised my own ‘Ridlaa’ branded clothing and produced a new music video (Mars Attacks) which led me to produce a 10 track, visual album called ‘Directors Kut’ and a short film in 2020 called ‘Middle Finger’.

The film, directed by my close friend Conrad Smart, focuses on the positives and negatives of being a neuro-diverse artist and the hidden complications that come with my condition (Brain AVM).”
The Birmingham peer group at their Showcase.
During lockdown our Learning Marathon Hosts came together for a reflective and collaborative process, with each Host writing a letter to the others.

"I have been a housewife all my life, with a passion for education however, having kids, I found it was difficult for me to pursue my own dreams, so I realised my dream through my children. With my kids all grown up and independent I realised I could have the pleasure of taking my son to school everyday, as well as providing a transport service to others. I used my time on the Learning Marathon to better understand how to use my own confidence to expand this little venture. The group helped me develop the skills I would need to be successful."

**Azra's Learning Question:**

**How do I set up my business and become independent?**

**Name:** Azra Javed  
**Learning Marathon:** London, 2018

"I have been a housewife all my life, with a passion for education however, having kids, I found it was difficult for me to pursue my own dreams, so I realised my dream through my children. With my kids all grown up and independent I realised I could have the pleasure of taking my son to school everyday, as well as providing a transport service to others. I used my time on the Learning Marathon to better understand how to use my own confidence to expand this little venture. The group helped me develop the skills I would need to be successful."

**Azra exploring the work of another participant**

**Bear Host,**

I AM POISED AT THE WATER’S EDGE, SHOES OFF, FEETING NAUSEOUS AND TERRORISED. JOURNEYING WITH YOU ALL ONCE AGAIN FEELS LIKE RETURNING TO A VAST AND INTIMATE URBAN PARK WITH FAVOURITE PLACES TO RETURN TO, BUT SO MANY UNDISCOVERED ROUTES TO WANDER ALONG WITH EACH NEW VISIT.

WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO BE AT THIS CRITICALLY A ROAD THAT FELL LESS LIKE A MIST, MORE LIKE A WINDING COUNTRY LANE AND THESE TWO ARE WALKING IN THIS PATH IN YOUR OWN UNIQUE WAY OUR PATHS ARE INTERTWINED, GRACEFULLY TANGLED IN THIS BALL OF THREAD.

SO MUCH OF MY TIME HAS BEEN SPENT IN SURVIVAL MODE, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LIVE FAST THIS YEAR, THIS BATTLE NOT ONLY TACTICALLY AND FINANCIALLY, NOW, WITH COVID, THE DREAM JOB I NEVER KNEW I WANTED, I FEEL OVERLAID AND LIMITED, THE OLD FEELING IS FINALLY LIFTING I FEEL LIKE I CAN START TO BREATHE AGAIN.

IT FEELS LIKE WE’RE LIVING IN A TIME BETWEEN DREAMS, SOME ARE MORE OR LESS WINNING (OR ABLE) TO ADMIT THEY HAVEN’T A CLUE WHAT LIES AHEAD, IT FILLS ME WITH ALL KINDS OF EMOTION TO THINK ABOUT THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD AND WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON’T OVERCOME THEM.

**Covid-19 has been an opportunity to pause, breathe, reflect, in an increasingly unceremonial environment.**

**In certain landscapes, the need for peer support and dynamic learning experiences is growing.**

**It feels like we are building this at the edge of the world, in a time of crisis, with further challenges on the horizon to test humanity.**

**And this place we call work gives us an unrelenting sense of hope.**

**Determination and belief in the experience I want to be part of making in how we take on the impossible together.**

**I have a strong belief that the experience of supportive peer groups can provide learning that shifts mindsets and when that happens anything is possible.**

**Peers groups of a certain size where everyone can authentically know everyone else where there is a social contract between the individuals to support each other over a period of time.**

**Are particularly powerful for – learning, unlearning, processing, healing, changing, behavioir, creating and taking action.**

**If we’re to keep holding the truth - for ourselves and anyone who cares to listen - these questions.

How do we continue working authentically on inclusion? What’s the role of learning in creating a more beautiful world? How can we continue to dream, together? How do we shape our thinking to meet the needs of the world? How do we grow without diluting our spirits? How can we make fun a key part of the adventure?**

**I think that all the insights in my head right now - are all linked with love - Amna, Muna, Noor, Dave, Ellie, Matt, Saima and Zarka.**

**During lockdown our Learning Marathon Hosts came together for a reflective and collaborative process, with each Host writing a letter to the others.**
The End
We all die. What have we learnt along the way?

Kat Murray-Clark
Learning Marathon Participant

The author and cultural commentator David Brookes talks about the difference between our résumé virtues and our eulogy virtues.

Résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace, professional accomplishments that we spin to sound better on our CVs. Eulogy virtues are the ones talked about at your funeral — whether you were kind, brave, honest or bold. Who you were. What you meant to the people who loved you. The impact you made on the lives of others. They are deeper virtues. And most of us would agree they are far more important than the virtues we exhibit on LinkedIn.

I first started thinking seriously about my own eulogy when I went to my Uncle’s funeral a few years ago. The crematorium was packed, standing room only with two overflow rooms where we watched the service from TV screens. My Aunt was devastated but she stood up and shared the most beautiful eulogy. She said one thing which completely summarised my Uncle, which I’ve thought about ever since.

“He never missed an opportunity to be kind.”

It was this virtue which guided his life, and even though he’d worked at the same company for 20 years and every one of his colleagues showed up, no one once mentioned how successful his career was. As my cohort was putting together our Showcase, to celebrate the end of our Learning Marathon, we looked for a theme that united all our questions.

We asked questions that allowed us to explore what matters to us, how we can make the most of our time together. And we did it with Enrol Yourself because we also wanted to learn from one another.

We wanted to use the Showcase to celebrate all we’ve learnt, and to reflect, to write our own eulogies, to use the clarity which comes from a definitive ending as a springboard to focus on the future, on the choices we make which may one day come to define us.

To do this we created interventions: interactive elements of the night which brought the theme to life. There was an experience of what it’s like to have ADHD from Joe, an interactive challenge of what it means to feel “better” from Sophie, and a series of readings from Josie which were perfectly timed with the tolling of the church bells, and brought the whole room together into moments of hushed reflective silence.

My Learning Question was “Who am I on-stage?” and so for my intervention… I did my very first clown show. I put all my learnings together and put “myself” on stage as my alter-ego, “Cindy”, a spin instructor/ life coach. Cindy re-created the joy, euphoria and general state of confusion which I feel during a spin class by forcing everyone to get out of their seats, put their hands up and (hopefully) laugh until their faces hurt and they forgot how stupid we all looked.

We also created an envelope full of gifts for our guests. Little snapshots of what we learnt. Inside there was a guide for how to write your own eulogy, as well as postcards, poems, and prompts for reflection, to inspire moments of clarity and introspection.

Over the course of the night, we all spoke for 5 minutes about our journey and its impact on our lives. There were plenty of tears, as well as snorts of laughter as we talked about the ups and downs of what we experienced together.

I was particularly moved by how willing everyone was to be open about their struggles, the personal reasons why we asked the questions that we did. The difference between what we set out to learn, and the ones talked about at your funeral — whether you meant to the people who loved you. The impact you made on the lives of others. They are deeper virtues. And most of us would agree they are far more important than the virtues we exhibit on LinkedIn.

The thing which stuck with me is that none of us really found “the answer” to our questions. And that’s ok. This was just the beginning of the life long learning journey.

“During the Learning Marathon I’ve lived in homes I can’t afford across London by catsitting, I’ve turned a mansion into an artist’s studio, filmed people taking a shower to find out where good ideas come from, and ate Snickers in four different countries. I’ve conducted life experiments to create a life I want to live.”

As a result of his Learning Marathon Matt started Special Guest, an event series that is co-created by its participants; an open mic night where you have 1 min to say whatever you want. More than 2000 people have attended Special Guest since 2017.

“Take 60 seconds to say/do/act/cry/confess/declare love. Do whatever YOU want, to a crowd who will cheer you on.”

— Special Guest attendee
"My Learning Question was about hope and activism. A couple of years later, I made a film about activism in Brixton. It connected back to my Learning Question."

- Fan Sissoko

"It became clear to me that stitching this backpack has no ‘purpose’ in the world other than to soothe my soul."

- Manisha Pandey

During her Learning Marathon Manisha began hand stitching a backpack to honour her ‘return journey’ from psychosis. 2 years later, she continues to stitch.

"I entered the Learning Marathon aiming to become a better software developer. What I actually emerged with is far more invigorating. I have learnt to nurture my irreverent nature."

- Tom Scanlon

"Making this was incredible for me. I used so many of my creative powers."

- Nadia Connell in front of her ‘enCHANTED Kingdom’, an interactive musical experience she made for her showcase event.

"I drew a self portrait (almost) every day for 6 weeks, reflecting on how I revealed myself through each mark."

For her showcase event, Farah Ahmed invited guests to draw their own self portrait.
Create learning experiences that are:

A) Peer-powered learning

Here, people co-operate to meet their learning needs by pooling their energy and resources, and taking on various roles at different times, such as teacher, facilitator, buddy etc. It can lead to a form of semi self-organisation that is useful for communities and social movements, amongst others.

Peer-powered learning relies on the assumption that everyone in the group has experience, knowledge and presence that they can share, and that will be valuable to others. Most likely this is why this type of learning is associated with increased feelings of wellbeing.

B) Self-directed learning

A self-directed learner takes the initiative in diagnosing their own learning needs, formulating goals, choosing materials or activities, implementing strategies and evaluating results. Typically they choose their subject, materials, rhythm and time commitment (as opposed to a taught learner who might only choose their subject).

The learner may have external input and teachers, but the learner always holds the vision and sets their own bar for success. Directing one’s own learning will become more important as rapid changes make it harder for educational institutions to pre-prescribe courses for rapidly changing fields and disciplines.

C) Design-led learning

This is defined by active exploration of real world challenges, deepening knowledge and creating all kinds of opportunities to participate in the world.

A design-led approach is inherently project-based and every project must be designed and managed. This means that there is much common ground between peers applying the same process — even if their projects are quite different.

Project-based learning emphasises activities that are long-term, interdisciplinary and learner-driven. The focus is on creating something of value, not exams or tests.
I came to this question in grief, rebuilding after the death of my daughter Norah. Whilst the passion behind my question came from a burning need to change the landscape for others, my learning journey has reacquainted me with my writer, my curiosity, my artist, my vulnerability, my voice, my academic, my confidence, my value, my motherhood, and all the aspects of my identity I had lost along my way.

The Learning Marathon presented itself to me at a significant pass in my life, and gently, challengingly, nudged and guided me to where I am now.

How can I show that death, dying and grief can still mean life, love and hope?

Name: Cass Humphries-Massey
Learning Marathon: Birmingham, 2018

“...I see shoulders. Many. Of all of us who dream and cry. My Dad’s own quest I can’t deny. My Mother’s love, and her Mum’s grief. Of all my siblings; shared belief. But where’s the ground for me to settle? Of which rose am I a petal? I wrote an essay. Clever, said my head. I raced around the park, grasping ahead. And then I noticed, tired. That there is this golden thread. A thread that’s been here all along. The selfsame air we hear as song.

This feels raw. Real. A little risky. I’m wondering what ground I stand on? Of all my siblings; shared belief. Of which rose am I a petal? I wrote an essay. Clever, said my head. I raced around the park, grasping ahead. And then I noticed, tired. That there is this golden thread. A thread that’s been here all along. The selfsame air we hear as song.

In-2-3-4.
Out-2-3-4.
In-2-3-4
Out-2-3-more.

This breath that was my own first sputterance. This breath that was Oma’s final shuddering utterance. This breath I sometimes wheeze or waste. This breath between us interlaced.

A part of us beyond the knowing. That same breath that left my Oma’s body shaking, My newborn child will drink it in awakening. The holy grail of any quest. The stream in which we all are blessed. Not a place but a moment. Not a space but a flame. Like rain that trickles in the forest, talking. Or birds that fly together, soaring. A bigness. A _________. A story beyond.

In breathless times our timeless bond. The ground that my soul can stand on. God right here, in one small breath. That sacred cycle life and death. As starlings in a murmuration. Our source, our voice, our incantation. And as I sit with Friends in silence, Here I find my full reliance.
Of course ‘inclusively’ is not a destination you can reach or something you can cross off your to do list. It’s a continual re-commitment, it’s about repeatedly stepping beyond our familiar territory.

So, during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, Vanessa Faloye (freelance trainer-facilitator in social justice education — and importantly, Learning Marathon participant) facilitated a process of digging deeper.

Some of the questions that came out of this process feel equal measures of fascinating, intricate and overwhelming. We may never find full answers. Here are a few that kept recurring.

**How much do we want to ‘set’ versus ‘let’?**

One of the things that makes the Learning Marathon different to other learning experiences is the extent to which it is self-directed. We follow through on our coaching approach: we don’t tell adults what success should mean for them.

This is part of what we mean by ‘setting’, and we believe there is power in trusting people in this way, despite the fact that it can be far more challenging than just ‘setting’ all the rules.

Having said this, we are providing a structure which to some extent ‘sets’ the framework within which people lead themselves. What we want to do is balance these powers.

**How do we strike the right balance?**

How do we safely remove as much structure as we provide? Particularly when different people want and need a different balance within the overall balance! What may feel balanced for someone with one particular identity might feel markedly unbalanced for someone else.

And, to what extent should we be clearly communicating what kind of balance we offer, so that people can opt in or out on that basis, versus working to support multiple balances?

**Is balance a fixed state of perfection or a constant state of correcting?**

This led to questions about what we mean by ‘balance’. We repeatedly found ourselves saying that we want to strike a balance. That it would be easier to pick a side, but that we didn’t want to do that.

Is balance an end state that we can arrive at, or do we need to think about this in a different way? Like the tightrope walker whose muscles are constantly making micro-corrections that result in an overall state of balance.

Intuitionally the latter resonates more, but it sounds like it relies on a brilliant sensory system that continually brings feedback from the body to the brain and back again. Do we have a brilliant sensory system? How do we develop one?

**How do we prepare people to ‘sit in the shit together’?**

‘Sitting in the shit’ doesn’t sound very fun! But it is a big part of committing to be part of a community over a considerable period of time (6 months in the case of the Learning Marathon). This is about preparing people to tackle the inevitable tensions, triggers and disagreements as they come up. And they will come up.

It feels like we’re asking a bigger, societal question here. Sitting in the shit with a dozen people is a way of practising what we need to do on a much larger scale. So part of preparing people to do this work is helping them make that connection to the bigger picture, which for most people helps them develop the motivation to continue at the small scale.

Sometimes it feels like challenging a group of people — who wouldn’t have met otherwise — to become a functioning learning community that works for everyone in it, is the most important thing we’re doing.

But the challenge is that every peer group is different. Every Host is different. The challenges that come up are different every time. We need to prepare Hosts to support their peer groups, without placing all the responsibility on them. We need to take responsibility too — and so do our participants.

Many learning experiences are ‘luxury’ experiences in the sense that they are designed to be as nice and pleasurable for the participants as possible. They are designed to make sure no one sits in the shit.

How do we buck this trend and still create a wonderful experience?
"Rooted by Design are a community of Black designers and problem solvers, deeply concerned by the disproportionate and structural inequalities UK Black communities experience."

-Kat Murray-Clark

"My learning Question was "Who am I on-stage?" and so I did my very first clown show. I put all my learnings together and created an alter-ego and performed as "Cindy" a spin instructor/life coach."

- Kat Murray-Clark

"The paintings show just a few of the communities I have been working with during my learning journey. During live painting sessions, I meet performers, community gatekeepers and audience members."

- Karimah Hassan

"I didn't fully launch my learning Marathon project. I was using the experience to 'test' what I wanted to do. In the end the experience led me to what became my business, Touco."

- Bailey Kursar

"I left my job to focus on my ideas, created a club to make them happen and set up a design studio to support my first steps into freedom."

- Anton Wade

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"In collaboration with Holly, we've prepared an interactive visualisation."

- Romek Goj with his showcase display

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"The first Enrol Camp, a co-created retreat for all participants and Hosts."

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"Ellie Pritchard with an extra long leg."

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Early in Enrol Yourself’s first Learning Marathon, I realised I’d hacked my Learning Question. Instead of asking one question, my question asked at least five:

• What role can user experience play in economics?
• What role can user-centred design play in economics social change?
• What role can UX research and design techniques play to support both?
• What role can I play?
• Can I become a UX researcher and designer in the field of economics social change?

Since asking those questions, I’ve found a role — in all sorts of senses. I now have a research and design-related job in a campaign, Economy, hoping to transform economics’ role in the public sphere. They let me call myself a ‘UX researcher for the economy’ and make things to communicate our experiences as ‘users’ of economics as a decision-making rationale that shapes the world.

But far more than this, the supportive, legitimising process of being in the community and structure of the Learning Marathon enabled me to reform my role in my relationship with myself.

Don’t get me wrong, my Learning Marathon was all about economics and design and I’ve come out the other side knowing deep in my bones that this is what I will do with my life.

But more importantly, that feeling of knowing something in my bones, that was missing for me before.

Enrol Yourself and mental health

I came to my first Learning Marathon having lost the end of 2015 to depression. It happened because I couldn’t get access to something I desperately needed — work that’s good for the world and access to a world I want to live in.

The most overwhelming about depression is not only that you completely lose your ability to be alone with your mind, you also hate your mind so much that you don’t want to expose it to others.

You lose your ability to structure any information about yourself or the world around you. It’s a process of skills falling away — you forget how to be a person, how to be in the world, and then you have to hide from it.

The Learning Marathon helped me create a safe space to re-establish a relationship with myself beyond uncertainty which, in the long cruel drive of bad work and no place in the world, had taken my life.

I relearned how to structure my own learning, to unlearn old responses and respond positively again to the idea that I still have so much further to run. Through The Learning Marathon, I learned how to be accountable to myself, how to have a personhood and how to be in the world.

Whole-heartedly, I believe the Learning Marathon is a transformative process for mental health.

One day before our showcase, I wrote this down, and meant it, bone-deep and boldly: ‘I have learned how to have a personhood in a community, an economy and within economics social change.’

Enrolling again – an act of participation

You can see why I chose to do another one. I’ve been just as inspired by my second peer group as the first, but, if anything, I’ve been more continuously open to joy. It’s been overwhelming at times — this sense of being thrilled that we all exist.

It gives me a glimpse of a world I hope for. Zahra summed it up perfectly in writing: ‘Peer-led learning that is purpose driven is an act of civic participation.’

As someone who longs for civic participation and a society I can participate in, I get it here. And it feels good.

I also had to re-enrol because I wasn’t finished.

My last depression was so devastating because it was fundamentally to do with work. For multiple reasons in the run up to breaking down, work became a terrifying social space to me.

After breaking down and leaving that job, although I had six weeks of space with a GP note, I still needed to work. (It’s that dratted money thing, innit?)

And, although by many other measures my life improved, my social anxiety kept rocketing, eventually causing me to quit work entirely five months later.

I had found that not being able to express anti-capitalist views publicly had made me want to go silent in social situations.
Our conversations around economics are often memes, culturally transmitted surface-level ideas, rapidly released.

To me, who has been thinking and talking critically about capitalism for a long time and striving against this type of feedback (‘Well, what would you replace capitalism with? Communism?’), it makes me feel like a meme of myself to speak about it.

Talking about economics and capitalism also involves talking about things which are abstract, contended, jargontastic, glaringly wrong. To talk meaningfully about economics, you also have to ask ‘What is money?’; which has a fantastically unintuitive answer (money is debt) and takes a lot of defending from socialised myths.

Strangely, as I started working in a social change campaign about economics communication, I have become even less able to talk about it. It could be because I’ve been listening to others about how they experience economics communication. A fascination with this ‘user experience’ of the economy has given me the habits of an ethnographic outsider. I got used to listening and hanging back.

But each time I try to talk about economics recently, I go another layer into myself, and another step further from communication. And so, my second Learning Marathon question is ‘How can I communicate economics x design socially?’

I have things to talk about and ideas to combine. I find them hard to convey and, at the moment, the answer to my question is I think I don’t want to.

If Enrol Yourself 1 helped me connect my high level question with the human one inside it (What role can I play?), Enrol Yourself 2 is allowing me to reveal to myself again who I am outside of economics.

I am learning that my confidence communicating about economics has become deeply tied to my social confidence and sense of self.

This Learning Marathon is allowing me to feel my feelings, one of which currently is reticence. I want to lean into this. For me, it’s a learning to let go, and to put myself first over my drive to communicate about economics as an activist. Maybe for a conversation to start, I have to draw breath.

What do you learn from running a marathon?

For me there’s been something else to this Learning Marathon idea — if I had to sum it up, it would be slow learning. I have developed my mental and physical stamina. I’ve learned how to listen internally and push my boundaries continuously. I’ve learned how to pace myself, with people there alongside me, willing each other to succeed at something unnecessary, optional and important.

A Learning Marathon is a challenge to integrate your life with boundary-pushing and gives you a chance to recognise that every day, every person makes courageous, embodied choices to go on. It’s a marathon in which you can tire but keep trying.

I want everyone I know to do it, to give themselves the time and legitimacy and self-trust to explore something. To relearn how to see their adult selves as learners and the lifelong exploration of their mind as something available to them whatever their circumstances.

“I want to lean into this. For me, it’s a learning to let go, and to put myself first over my drive to communicate about economics as an activist. Maybe for a conversation to start, I have to draw breath.”
The 9th Learning Marathon peer group on their Finish Line weekend

A meet-up in Bristol becomes a pizza party

Hosts Matt and Ellie, the Deep Learning Marathon united two peer groups around the theme of human connection. Their Kick-Off Weekend was spent at the Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking.

“Remember, it is not the circumstances that create joy, it is you”
- Tracey Sage

A year on from her Learning Marathon, Tracey continues to keep a series of promises to herself, including a daily joyfilled practice.

During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, Beth Hammond offered an online drawing class, attended by her Bristol peer group member Delia Slucut: “We are just about to have our 20th session, it’s been wonderful, just what my soul needed. So grateful to have met the world that is Beth because of Enrol Yourself.”

Martha Lawton developed value-based Enrol bank notes, for her Showcase audience to exchange during the event. “I wanted people to ask themselves whether they could have more of what they care about, without spending more money.”

Co-founder Zahra performing ‘The Hanged Woman’, a conversation between her different ‘selves’.

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A year on from her Learning Marathon, Tracey continues to keep a series of promises to herself, including a daily joyfilled practice.
Most of us recognise that we live on a planet with limited resources, and that we must relinquish our desire for economic growth if we are to survive.

But what if this urgent need for course-correction could prompt us to redirect our desire for unlimited growth towards something more profound? Like learning – the unlocking of infinite human potential – and the fruits that come with it?

Over the course of 2019/20, we have seen the speeding up of various climate tipping points. Huge wildfires have ravaged the Amazon, Australia and Siberia. The price of oil fell below zero. We’ve been faced with a pandemic that shut down most of the world, and the rising up of the movement for Black Lives Matter in the wake of police brutality in America.

During this time of uncertainty, I also hosted my first Learning Marathon.

It has been a lifeline amongst everything that is happening. Together, my peer group and I have been able to sit with the many questions of these times and not need to find all the answers.

Being in this community has helped me to understand that life is complex – and the further we expand our capacity to hold this complexity, somehow ‘the more’ becomes possible. It has felt like a space where we can practise building the world of our longing, even in the face of adversity.

Many of us within Enrol Yourself are connected to the idea that peer-led learning is a rehearsal for an uncertain future that will require new levels of adaptability, resilience and connection.

We also believe it is a catalyst for creating the right conditions for a post-growth world to become reality.

How? Peer-led learning creates the fertile soil for individual and collective enrichment, and this facilitates the inner transformation needed to support our changing world.

We learn in relationship, either with an idea, a community, a person. Our deepest and most embodied learning comes from relationality.

Peer-led learning does this beautifully. It doesn’t mean glossing over the challenges and difficulties, but figuring out how they become part of the process of deepening our relationality with each other. Especially in times where – metaphorically and physically – it feels like people are getting further and further away from each other.

It’s learning, through simple coaching techniques, that anyone can help someone find their own answers rather than imposing their own. It’s understanding the role of reciprocity in our relationships and how all of us have something we can bring to the table. All of this grows our resilience and capacity to drive our own learning as part of our ability to survive and thrive.

It is the shifts that happen internally; the ‘aha’ moments that open up possibilities; the squeeze and contraction of a challenge or clash, and the new capacity that is made through it. It’s empowering our learning and reclaiming the knowledge we each carry within us.

With the possibility of initiatives like a universal basic income becoming more tangible, as well as the reckoning of our economy coming to a standstill and the ongoing shift in ways of working due to COVID-19, getting creative with our learning and response to the current circumstances is going to support the transition many people are already making.

If more of us had the skills and support to facilitate our individual and collective learning, we may find a world where we spend our spare time exploring our passions, following our curiosities and living in deeper connection with ourselves and others.

Imagine how this space could give way to skill swapping, sharing, learning how to make and mend, sharing resources and generally cultivating a life beyond our current model of capitalism.

Imagine growing our collective capacity for our individual and interpersonal growth and how it would feed and nourish us on the micro and macro scales. We could all become closer to what we must let go of, what must we acknowledge and what must we cultivate in this moment of uncertainty.

Which is why I ask the question: who must we become?

This question doesn’t point towards success or stardom. It is connected to the spiritual journey of bringing forth our unique individual gifts as part of our ability to survive and thrive in this world.

The concept of lifelong learning evokes a totally different system, one that brings our individual and collective learning closer to the fundamental purpose of our lives, throughout our lives.

I believe it is this connection to our gifts, to our purpose and to one another that is needed for the individual and collective transition towards a sustainable and equitable future.
Thank you

To Iacob Bacian for collaborating to start this thing.
To the pilot group, the first group of participants to take a chance and get involved: Amal Hmayed, Ali Norrish, Clemence Tanzi, Daniel Ford, Ellie Pritchard, Fan Sissoko, Robbie Bates and...
To Laura Billings, the very first person to apply, and who also gifted us space at Edspace to develop the idea.
To every single participant we have worked with.
Our Hosts: David Heinemann, Anneka Deva, Anna Garland, Sarah Adefehinti, Alana Bloom, Matt McStravick, Ellie Osborne.
To Carolyn and Giles Davidson for use of your place, for Enrol Camps, retreats, and the real birthplace of the idea.
To Johnnie Vincent, who found Enrol Yourself forced upon him, for his endless support.
To the Our Place in the World award for supporting our early steps into the world.
To the RSA and Mastercard Centre for Inclusive Growth for supporting our approach to having a positive impact.
To the Arc Centre for being our first proper home.
To Edith Whitehead and Thom Bartley for taking photographs that capture the magic of our Showcases.
To Ellie Pritchard for designing our Enrol Yourself illustrations, featured in many of these pages.
To Katie Slee for designing this wonderful book.

Get in touch

We’d love to know what you think

Email: hello@enrolyourself.com
Twitter: @EnrolYourself
Instagram: @Enrol_Yourself