

Our Lives, Our Voices, Our Future:
Insights into the Mental Health
Experiences of Traveller Men and
its Implications for Social Care
Practice

David Friel
ATU Donegal



**Our Lives, Our Voices,
Our Future: Traveller Men**

2022

DTP



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Oige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

HE

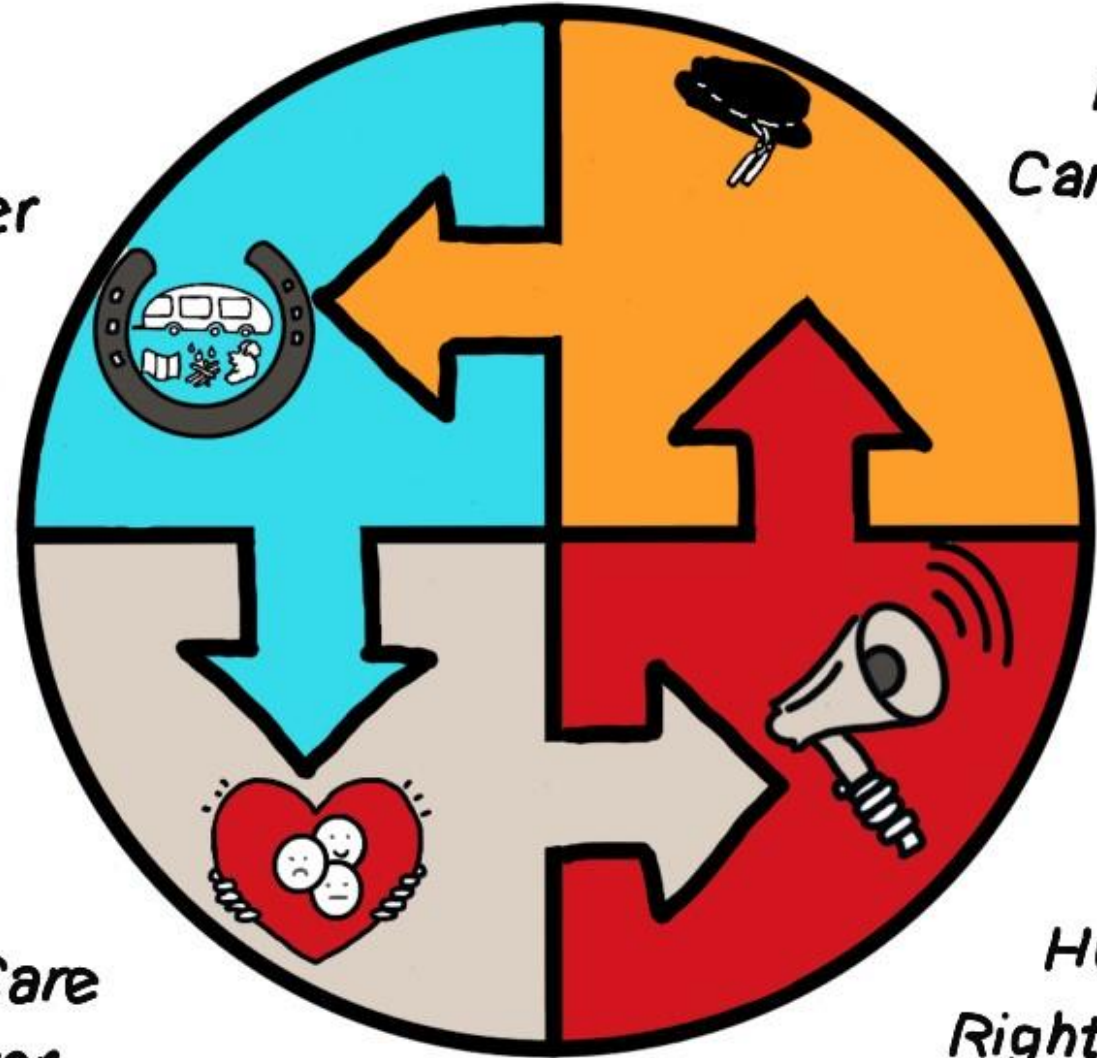
**Connecting for Life
Donegal**



David Friel

Irish Traveller

PhD Candidate



Social Care Lecturer

Human Rights Activist



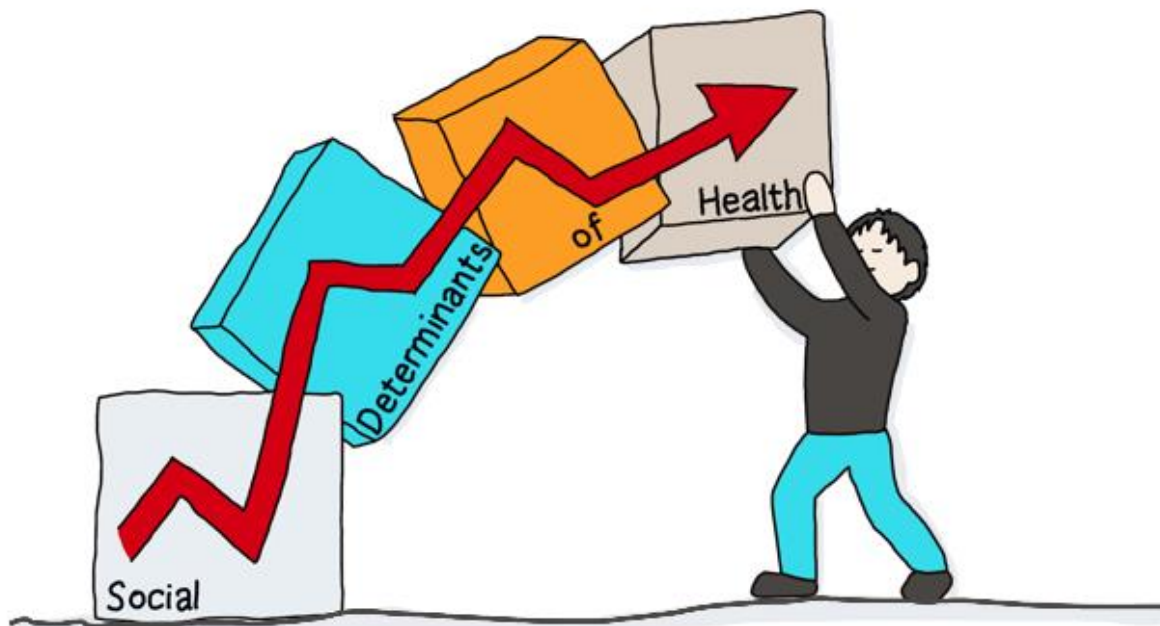
Research Process

Main Research Question

“

What are the mental health experiences of Traveller men living in Donegal?

”



Research Stages and Process



Stage 1 - Planning



Stage 2 - Research Design



Stage 3 - Data Collection



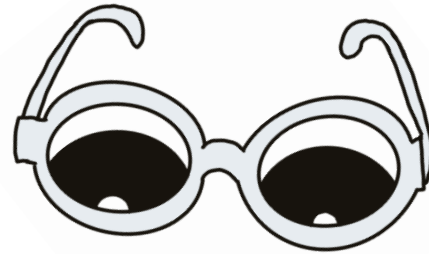
Stage 4 - Dissemination



Data Collection and Ethics



Semi-Structured Interviews



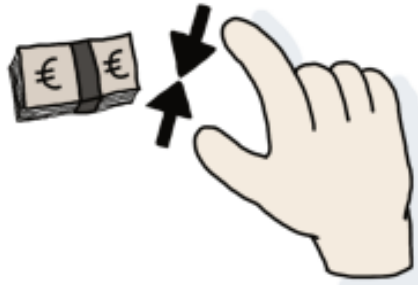
Traveller Men's Voices: The Findings



Mental Health



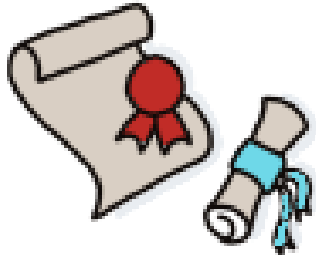
Physical Health



Poverty



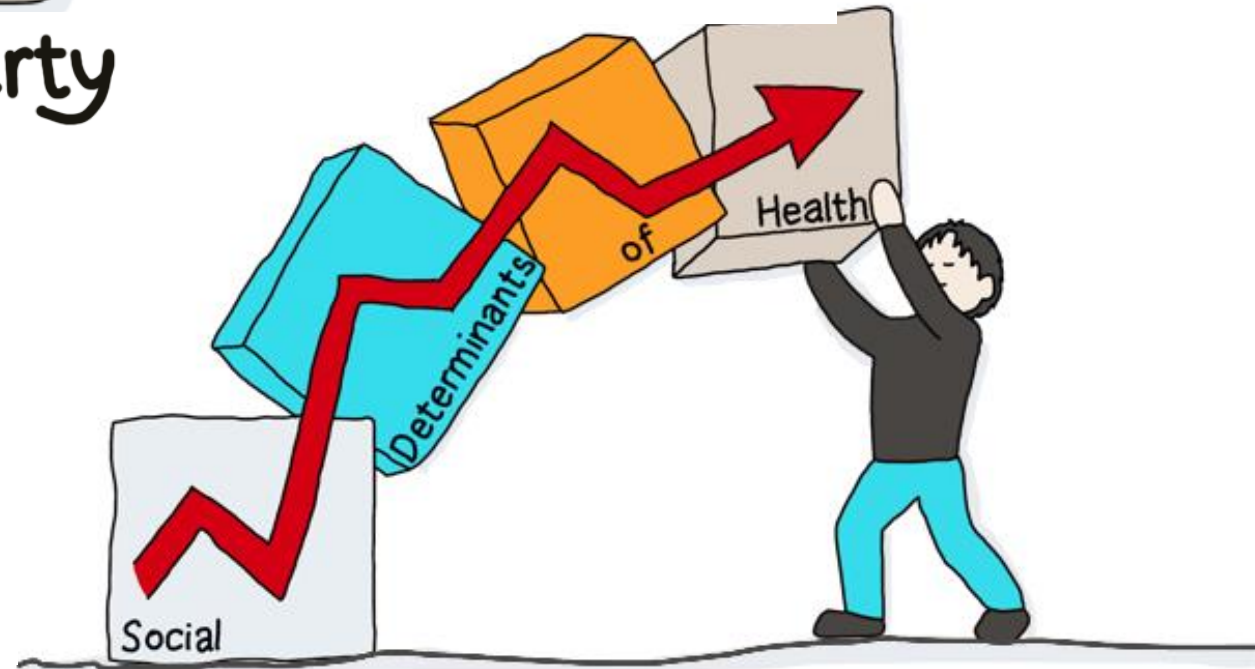
Employment



Education



Accommodation



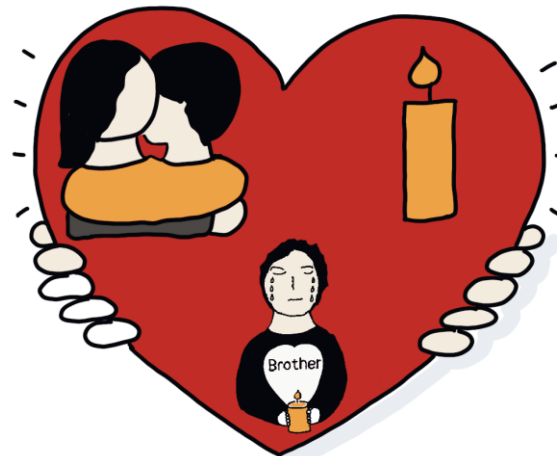
Traveller Men's Voices: The Findings



Suicidal Feelings



Bereavement



Grief



Drugs and Alcohol

“

My brother was hit by a car when he was 8 years old by a teacher and died. I will never get over that. My mother died of cancer in her early 50s and my father passed away shortly after in his mid 50's after a major heart attack. Death happens every other week in the community. As a gay Traveller man, I know three Traveller men that were gay that have recently taken their own lives. So so much sadness.... It sometimes takes over my head and kills every thought I have about being happy. **Participant 9**

”

“

I have lost three children. Two in tragic circumstances and one to suicide. It never gets easier. It's hard to think that you have outlived your children. It's not right...the death of my family has led to my depression...I will never forget finding [his child] in the caravan, too young. She was just there. No pulse...nothing. **Participant 10**

”

Traveller Men's Voices: The Findings



Lack of Access to GP and
Mental Health Services

“

I changed my doctor recently, but one time I went to him and said I didn't feel right. I was bad with my nerves. He told me that it wouldn't help me if I was looking to get onto the disability. I wasn't on about that at all. I asked him directly did he have a problem with me, was it because I was a Traveller. He wouldn't answer me. Every time I went in, I know he didn't want to see me coming. I didn't want to go to the doctor, things like that would put you off. **Participant 5**

”

Traveller Men's Voices: The Findings



Hegemonic Masculinity



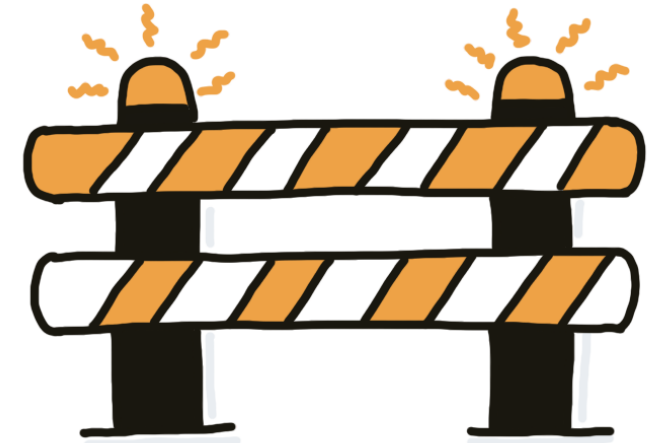
Internal and External Shame

“

Traveller men have too much to unpack because we are told to suppress it from day one. Don't let anything get you down; keep your head up and keep walking. I think that is where the high rate of suicide comes from in our community. Don't make a show of me, don't be an innocent boy, don't make a show of yourself telling people you have problems... Yeah, there is a shame when talking about mental health to others outside the community... Whether you believe it or not, for the thousands of years that we have been in Ireland when people hear the word Traveller they consciously or subconsciously hear the word problem, they automatically assume bad, wrong, something to be frightened of and told we are the bad people. **Participant 7**

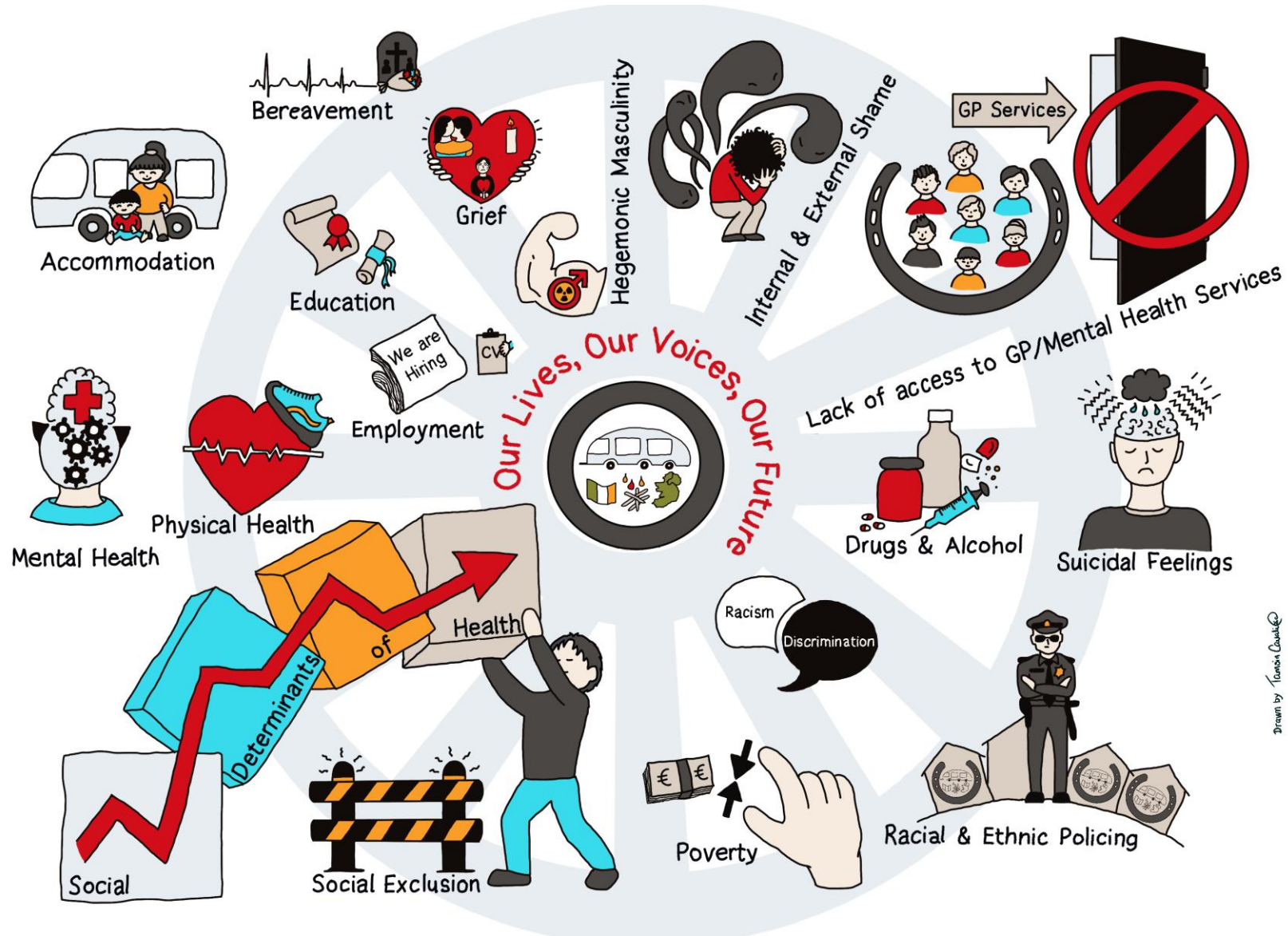
”

Traveller Men's Voices: The Findings

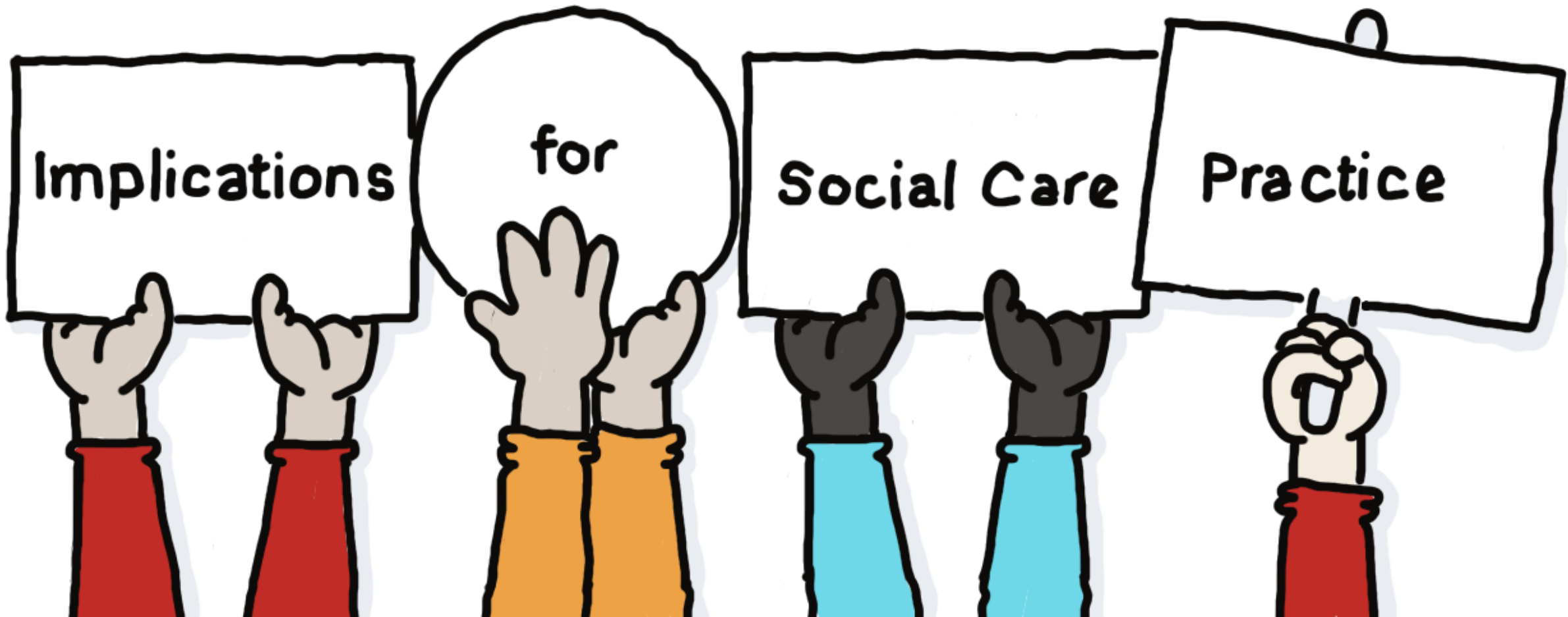


Social Exclusion

Racial and Ethnic Policing



Drawn by Tamsin Coakley



Implications

for

Social Care

Practice

Identity



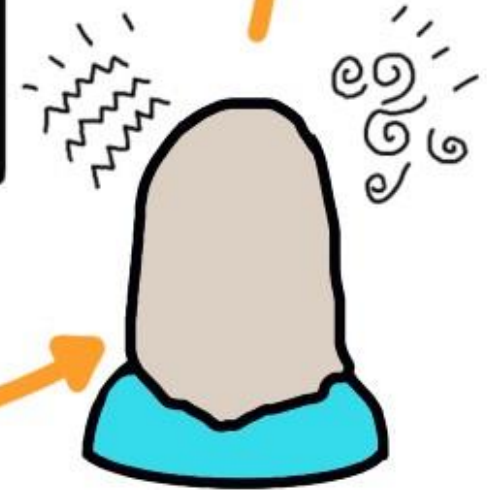
To be continuously explored & developed

To be examined in relation to

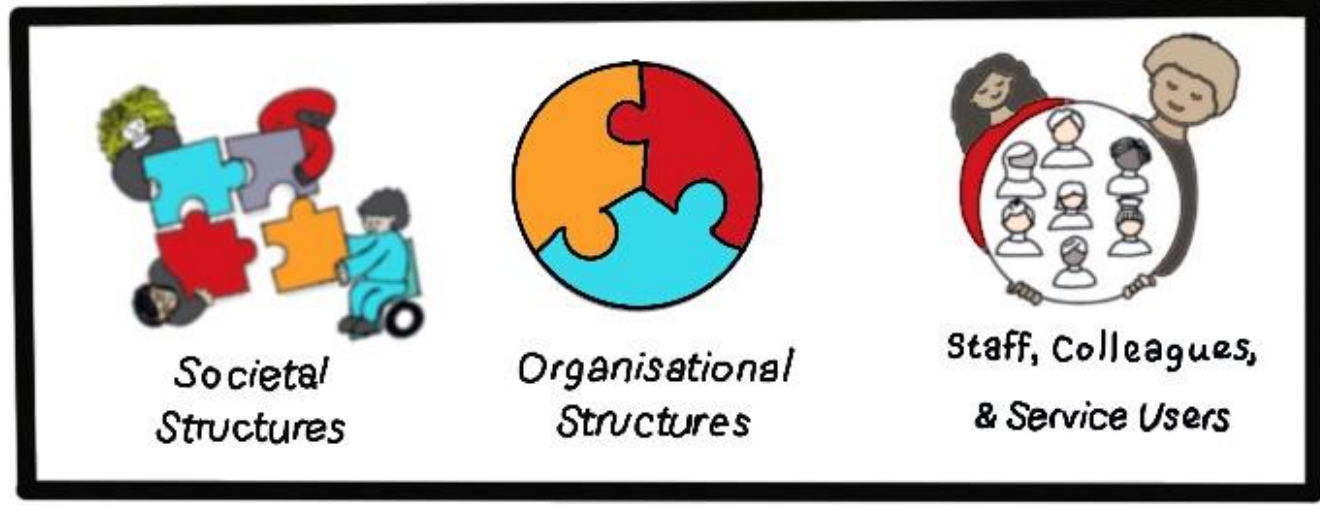
Involves addressing your assumptions by finding strategies relating to

Reflexivity

Questioning your assumptions leads to



Your assumptions



Societal Structures

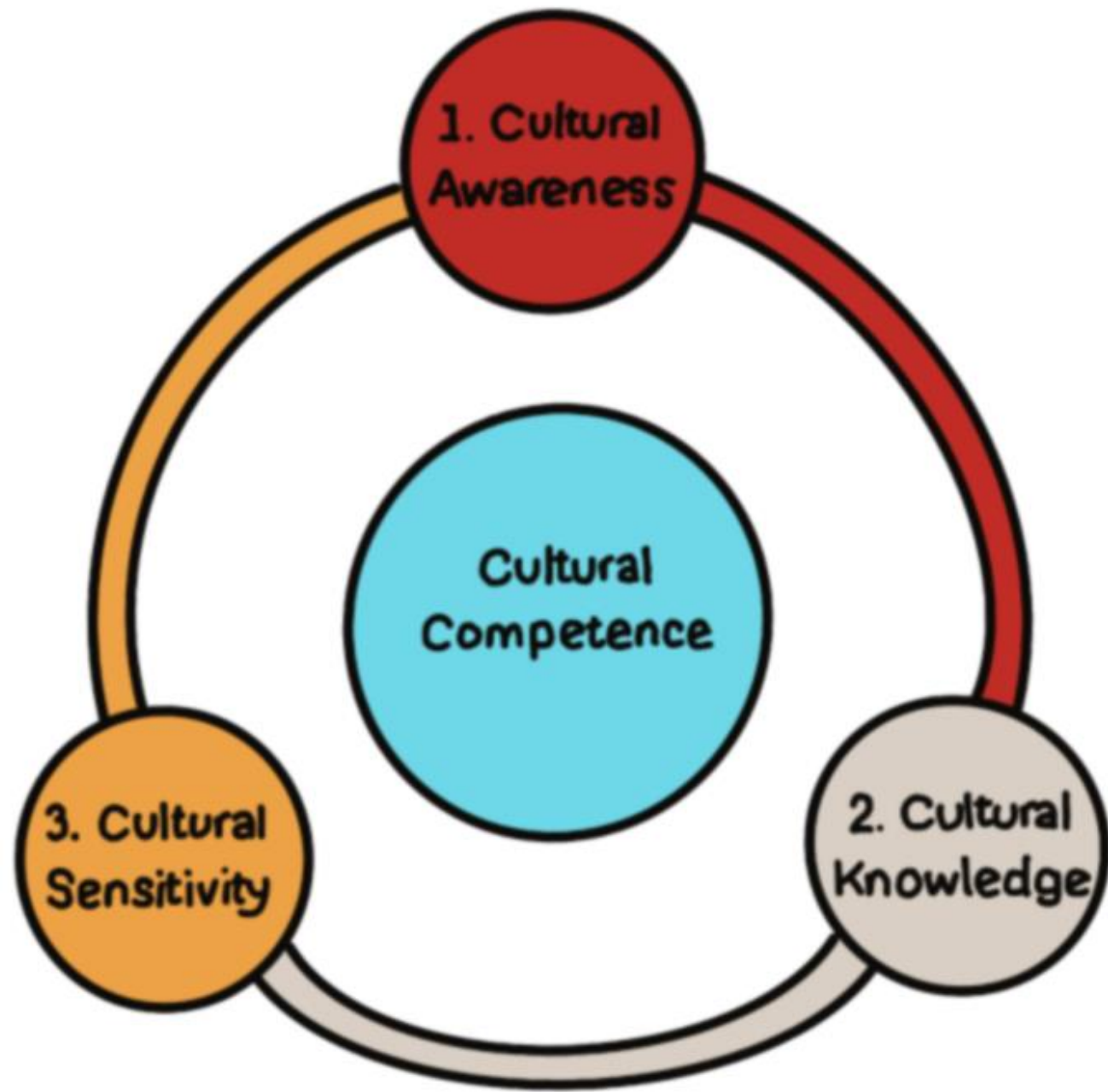
Organisational Structures

Staff, Colleagues, & Service Users

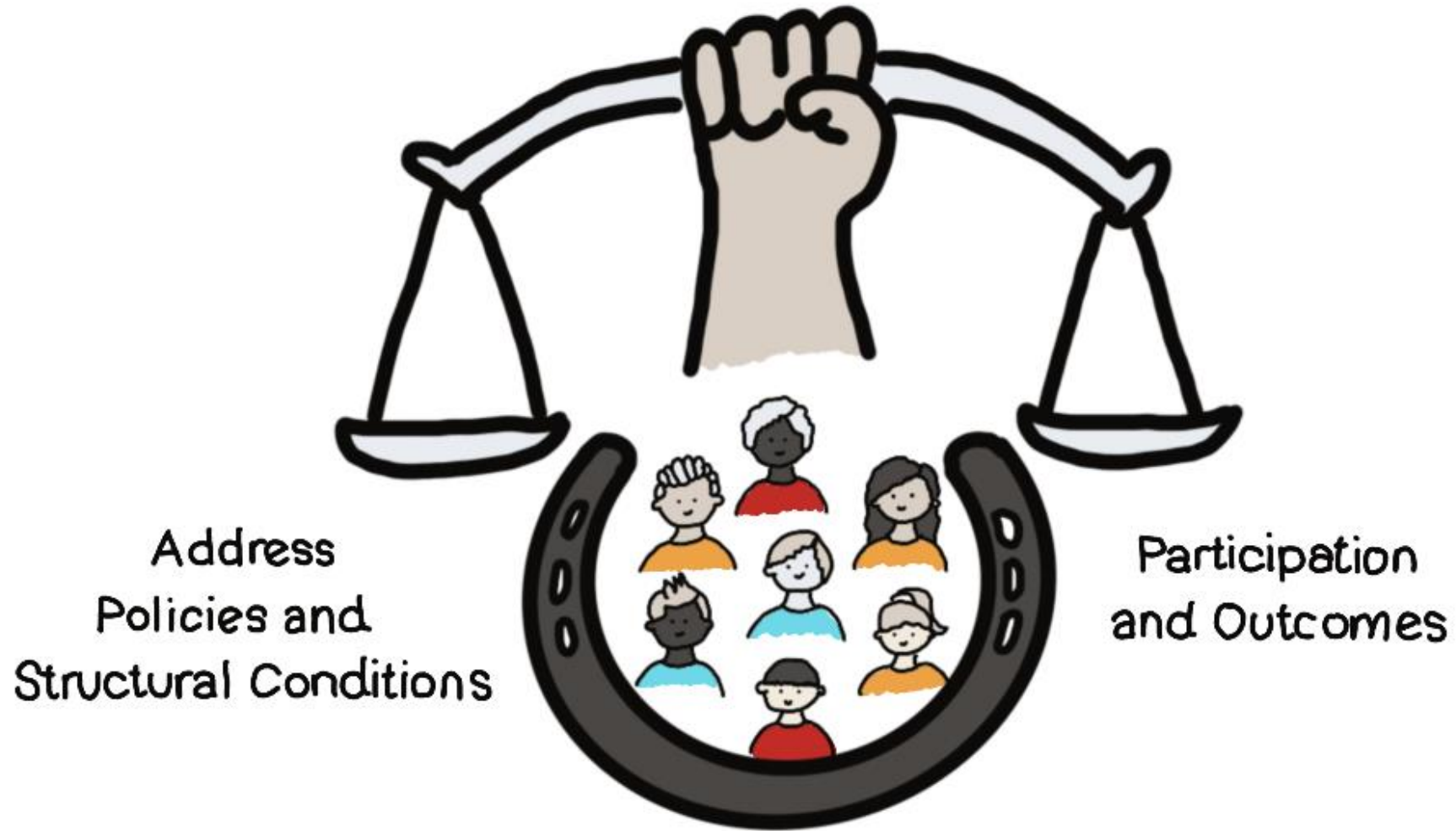
Positionality

Involves accounting for and consciously examining

Involves clearly stating



Collectively Advocate



Concluding Thought:

“

I would like our community to turn around and be a way where we do not need other organisations to do this and that on our behalf. Like read, write, spell and complete applications. I would like us to have enough knowledge and understanding of the world around us to be involved in how it is shaped. To be involved in the laws and policies that govern it. I would like us to step into the same role as any other member of society, but at the end of the day, I know that's not going to happen. It would be nice to have a platform for Travellers instead of settled people telling us what is wrong in the community. It would be ideal to have Travellers in the positions to make the changes that mean something to our community...That's what I would like to see happening just instead of us talking about our experiences, we take that experience and use it in a way we can make a change for the next Traveller.

Participant 7

”



Email: David.friel@atu.ie