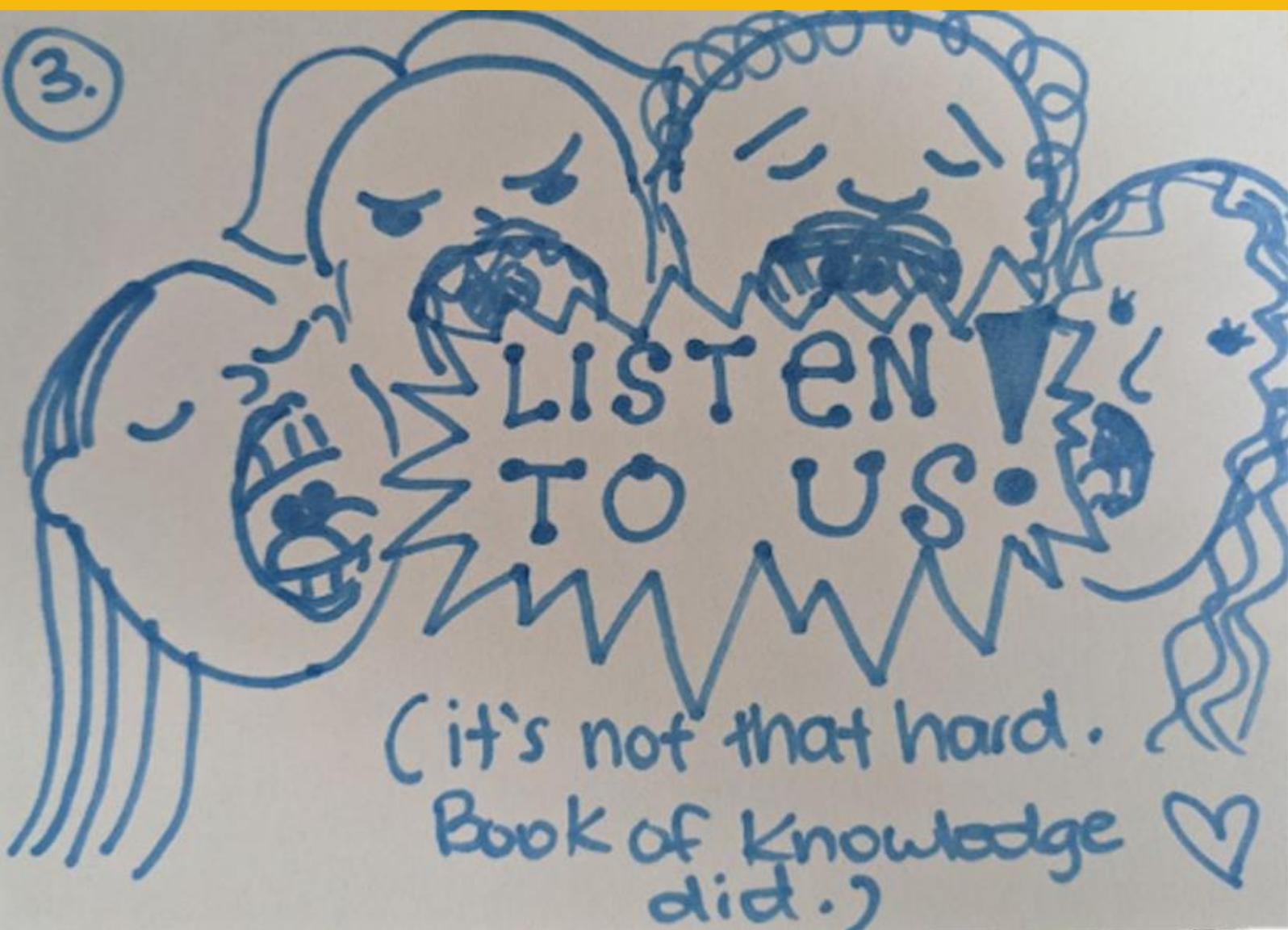


The Book of Knowledge: What I Wish I'd Known and What I'd Like to Pass On

Dr Katharine Low (Centre for Education, King's College London), Katrina Rawson-Mackenzie and Amy Russell (The Bridge – Health, Fitness and Wellbeing), Maryam Shaharuddin (Researcher and Participatory Artist), with contributions from participants Alysa, Anne-Marie, Asha, Ayana, Beatrice, Blossom, Carol, Cashka, Cecilia, Claire, Cristina, Daisy, Francesca, Haleema, Isabella, Jane, Jeanette, Jemma, Jess, Julia, Lara, Lilian, Lorraine, Lucy, Maisie, Malika, Mariya, Nina, Noura, Ons, Rachel, Raine, Roxanne, Shana, Shrina, Sofia, Sue, Therese, Wendy and Zoe.





PROJECT SUMMARY

The Book of Knowledge project brought together an intergenerational group of women to reimagine how we talk about women’s health. Delivered collaboratively by The Bridge, a women’s health & wellbeing organisation, and King’s College London, the project was co-created by participants through a series of creative workshops exploring the theme “*What I Wish I’d Known and What I’d Like to Pass On.*”

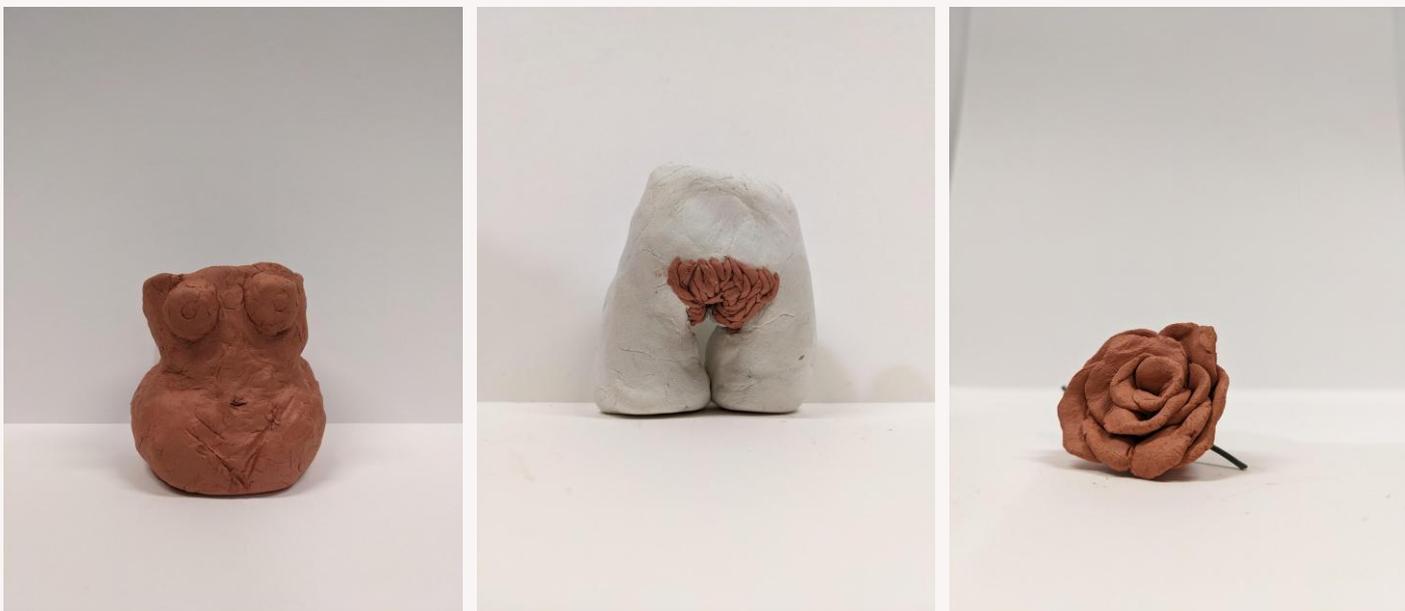
Using accessible creative methods—from performance to pottery—the workshops opened up non-judgemental conversations about health and wellbeing, particularly for women whose perspectives are often marginalised in mainstream research and services. Each session created space for shared learning and storytelling, nurturing a sense of solidarity, confidence and collective care.

The final publication, *The Book of Knowledge*, and its accompanying exhibition bring these insights together. Both demonstrate how creative practice can help women articulate embodied knowledge and reshape narratives around health, ageing, gender and community care.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The Book of Knowledge grew from conversations between The Bridge and Dr Katharine Low about how women’s health is often met with silence, dismissal and stigma. Staff at The Bridge frequently saw women — including Muslim women, older women, carers and survivors of gender-based violence — struggling to have their experiences recognised within healthcare systems. At the same time, Low’s participatory arts research explored how creative and embodied methods could open space for women to speak on their own terms and challenge the inequalities embedded in traditional health narratives.

The collaboration was formed through an AHRC Impact Acceleration “sandpit” event, where the team identified a shared commitment to co-production, care and community-led knowledge. Low partnered with Katrina Rawson-Mackenzie and Amy Russell from The Bridge, alongside artist-researcher Maryam Shaharuddin, to design a programme that centred women’s expertise in their own health. Their aim was to create an intergenerational, culturally inclusive space where women could learn from one another, articulate embodied knowledge and reimagine wellbeing beyond medical frameworks. This vision became *The Book of Knowledge* — a year-long creative project culminating in a publication and exhibition that honour women’s collective wisdom and resilience.



WHAT HAPPENED?

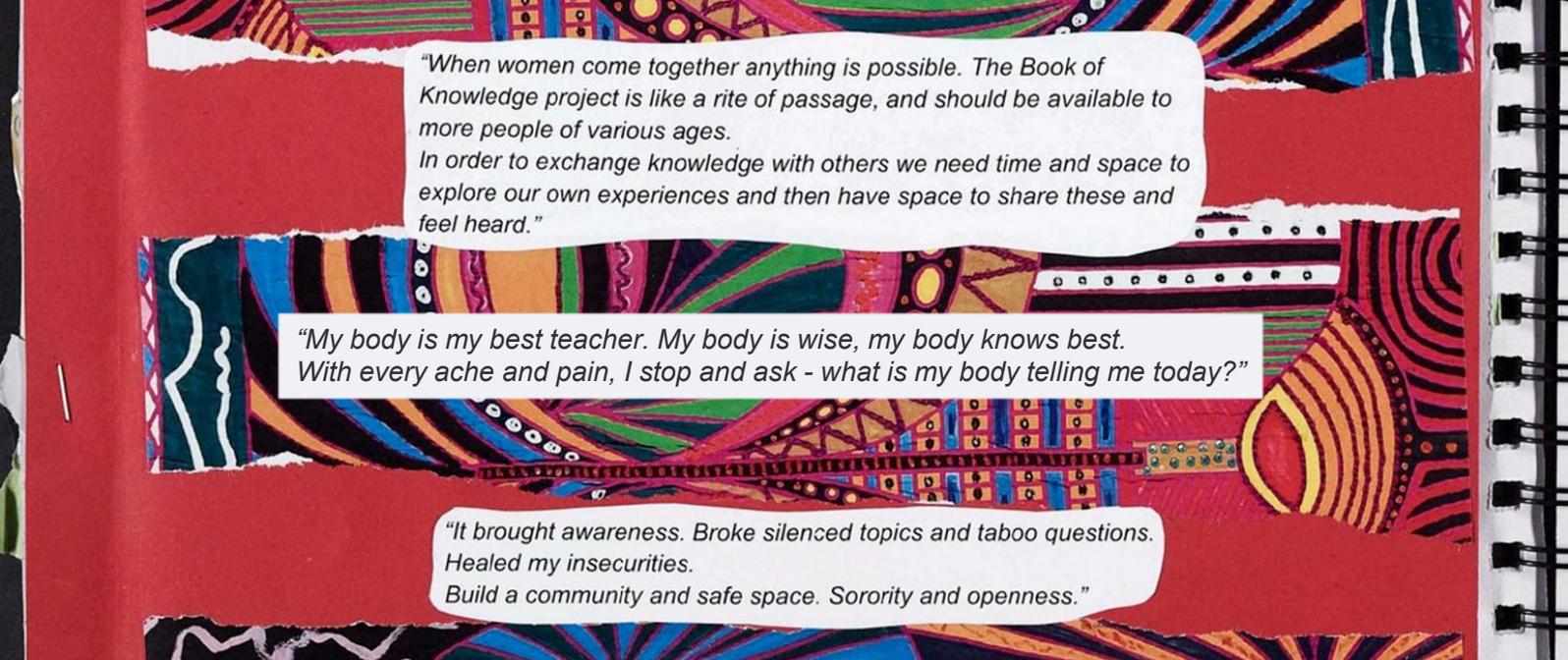
Over twelve months, participants met monthly at The Bridge for a series of “make and talk” workshops that paired creative activity with open conversation about women’s health and lived experience. Each session introduced a different artform, such as printmaking, collage, poetry, clay work, badge-making, bread-making, bulb planting and scarf painting. These artforms offered accessible, non-clinical ways into topics that many women found difficult to discuss in traditional settings. Creative methods were intentionally varied, allowing women to move between tactile, expressive and reflective modes of making depending on the theme of the month.

The workshops were co-facilitated by Katharine Low, Maryam Shaharuddin and The Bridge team (Katrina Rawson-Mackenzie and Amy Russell), whose combined expertise helped create a warm, collaborative environment. In addition, invited artists-facilitators were invited to share their practice, including: Sue Mayo (creative objects and portraits), Rakaya Fetuga (poetry), Hafsa Hasan (women's health cycles), Zoe Williams (the Vagina Museum), and Jill Power (creative reflective writing). The facilitation team worked closely together, meeting between sessions to adjust materials, pacing and emotional support in response to what was emerging in the room.

Sessions were shaped collectively, with women deciding what to explore, how to structure activities, and what forms of making felt meaningful to them. This approach allowed participants to guide discussions on themes such as menopause, familial knowledge, faith, sexuality, intergenerational learning, and the emotional and physical “marks” our bodies hold. Some sessions prompted strong emotions; for example, the clay workshop, where participants navigated discomfort discussing intimate anatomy, and the bread-making workshop, which surfaced shared grief and family memories.

Shared meals were central to the rhythm of the programme, giving participants time to connect socially and reflect together after each activity. Over the year, the group co-authored *The Book of Knowledge*, selecting images, text and layouts, and organising the book around three recurring themes: Beyond the Biological, Embodied Work, and The Power of “We.”

The project concluded with a public exhibition at The Bridge (December 2024), where participants displayed their artworks, launched the *Book of Knowledge*, hosted a panel discussion and invited visitors to try creative activities drawn from the workshops. The event served both as a celebration of the women’s work and as a wider conversation starter about the importance of women-centred, creative spaces for health and wellbeing.



"When women come together anything is possible. The Book of Knowledge project is like a rite of passage, and should be available to more people of various ages. In order to exchange knowledge with others we need time and space to explore our own experiences and then have space to share these and feel heard."

"My body is my best teacher. My body is wise, my body knows best. With every ache and pain, I stop and ask - what is my body telling me today?"

"It brought awareness. Broke silenced topics and taboo questions. Healed my insecurities. Build a community and safe space. Sorority and openness."

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The Book of Knowledge created meaningful change for participants, facilitators and the wider community. For the women involved, the workshops offered a rare space to speak openly about their bodies and health experiences without fear of judgement. Many described increased confidence in their own knowledge, a deeper understanding of their wellbeing, and a renewed sense of connection. The intergenerational nature of the group strengthened this impact: women exchanged stories across age, culture and faith, building friendships and finding "safety and strength in solidarity," as reflected in the final artefact.

The creative process was central to this transformation. One participant reflected: "creating is a feeling that rhymes all over my body". Activities such as bread-making, clay work, bulb planting and scarf painting enabled women to express emotions, memories and embodied knowledge that were often difficult to articulate verbally. Some sessions brought challenging feelings to the surface — grief, discomfort or past experiences of being unheard — but the facilitation team held these moments with care, ensuring the workshops remained supportive and grounded. Shared meals helped women process the activities and contributed to a strong sense of belonging.

For the facilitators, the project offered a powerful model of co-production. Working together allowed the group to remain flexible and responsive, adapting methods to the needs and energies in the room. This strengthened professional practice across the team, deepened their understanding of accessibility and emotional labour, and demonstrated the value of creating genuinely kind research spaces. The project has already informed conference presentations, new strands of participatory research, and ongoing work with women of various backgrounds and experiences.

The Bridge has begun adapting the project's model for other groups and programmes, advancing its mission to create kind spaces where women support one another's health and wellbeing, build confidence, and collectively challenge injustice. The final publication and exhibition extended the project's reach further, offering community members, healthcare practitioners and researchers a window into the knowledge shared across the year. Audience feedback highlighted how needed such women-centred spaces are, particularly at a time when they are becoming increasingly rare.

Overall, the project showed how creativity, hospitality and co-production can reshape conversations about women's health — and how community-led approaches can generate insights that traditional research often overlooks.

KATHARINE'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

- 1. Create spaces of radical welcome.**
Impact begins with trust. Designing environments where participants feel safe, unhurried and genuinely listened to allows deeper conversations, stronger relationships and more meaningful knowledge to emerge.
- 1. Let participants shape the process.**
Co-production is most powerful when people can influence the direction of workshops, the methods used and the final outputs. Handing over creative and decision-making agency strengthens ownership and enriches the work.
- 1. Use creative methods to surface embodied knowledge.**
Arts-based activities open ways of speaking and thinking that traditional interviews cannot. Tactile, sensory and reflective practices can unlock insights about health, care and lived experience that are often overlooked in formal research settings.

FURTHER READING

- *The Book of Knowledge, The Bridge – Health, Fitness and Wellbeing.*
Available at: <https://www.thebridge-uk.org/bookofknowledge>
- Low, K. E., Petretti, S., Lowry, C. B., & Shaharuddin, M. (2025). 'DEFEND, DEFEND, DEFEND': women's HIV health activism, embodied feminist performance-making and radical kindness. *Medical Humanities*, 51(2).
<https://mh.bmj.com/content/51/2/276>
- Low, K. E. (2021). Ways of making: Artistic practice which works co-collaboratively, ethically and which celebrates and extends the conversation of what it means to live well with HIV. *Medical Humanities*.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8640331/>



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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/arts/hums/research/impact*