



RESEARCH TEAM

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IMPACT STORIES

Immersive Empathy: Co-Creating Immersive Narratives on Home and Homelessness

University of Galway

Immersive Empathy responds to the ongoing Irish homelessness crisis, which has seen homelessness figures increase by over 600% in ten years, by empowering those experiencing homelessness to express their experiences via immersive technologies. International and Irish studies of media coverage of homelessness reveal a tendency to simplify the causes of homelessness and marginalise the voices of those experiencing homelessness. Immersive Empathy counters these media representations by co-creating immersive narratives with people who have experienced homelessness, and measuring the impact of this immersive experience on empathy and knowledge levels amongst members of the general public as well as the impact on participants of sharing their stories through the co-creation process.

Immersive Empathy is a collaboration between researchers within the disciplines of film, drama, psychology, business and digital humanities at the University of Galway, as well as VR industry professionals, and clients of Galway Simon who have experienced homelessness. The project involved a series of collaborative workshops, empowering participants to translate their personal narratives into an immersive film, *Lost & Found*, which narrates the experience of homelessness from the perspective of those who have lived it.

Empowering people who had experienced homelessness to speak for themselves had a transformative effect on their self-confidence and sense of what was possible, whilst testing has demonstrated a clear and significant impact of *Lost & Found* on empathy levels and social attitudes amongst viewers. The co-creation methodology developed for this project has subsequently been adapted by the project team to work with secondary school students who created VR films around the theme of empathy and bullying.

"It put me across the table with people who had experienced homelessness in their life. It made me realise the privilege of a roof over my head. [...] I had no choice but to sign up as a volunteer and do what I could to help others."

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