

So onwards to the David Buchan Lecture.

David Buchan was a Folklorist from Aberdeen here, he went to Aberdeen Grammar and had a distinguished career across North America,

mainly, although he taught at the University of Stirling for some years at a Scottish studies programme that he started there.

But he was head of Department of Newfoundland Memorial University,

and he started out actually at the university in Amherst in Massachusetts, where he did his dissertation on the ballad

and the folk, which is about an extraordinary singer, Anna Brown or Anna Gordon,

who lived in Humanity Manse just down the High Street here in the 18th century.

And she provided a number of wonderful ballads from Deeside to Walter Scott.

And he published a few of them. And she was very annoyed by that because he didn't ask her permission.

So we tend to ask people's permission before we publish things, having learnt from Walter Scott's mistakes.

But at any rate, this is a pioneering study of oral tradition and how people remember songs,

how people bring their creativity to bear and their memory on reproducing songs from their youth.

She learnt these songs up Deeside from her youth. She was married to a professor here at the university.

Very capable, very literate, but also possessed of incredible, wonderfully complete sets of words for these for these ballads.

And this reminds me of when Alan Lomax, the American song collector, came to Scotland.

He said, 'nowhere have I found singers of all songs who are very bookish,

but who and also bookish people who know the most beautiful oral versions of songs'.

So the Scottish tradition of education did not get in the way of oral tradition and to think of them as opposites.

And competing with each other is a definite mistake because people have both people were able to read,

they're able to write, and they can have oral traditions as well. They're symbiotic. They're supportive, mutually supportive traditions.

as David Atkinson says. So we'll move on with today's Buchan lecture with Amy Skillman.

And as I said at the beginning, this is a topic that's dear to our hearts because we are involved with the community and we want to,

to some extent, be driven by what the community wants and needs.

And so it's not to impose our ideas of what we think North-East culture is or what it should be used for.

So if we can create projects in partnership with people rather than impose things,

then I think we have you know, we're heading towards cultural sustainability.

And I'm sure Amy will explain how it's really done. Thank you.

Thank you. I have to switch to my one go.

OK, well, thank you, Tom. I am going to talk to you today about a number of projects that I've been working on.

And I could spend an hour or four talking about each one.

So I'm actually going to read what I've written in order to stay within a reasonable timeframe.

So it's truly an honour to have been selected for this year's David Buchan Lecture.

It's been a gift to be here with you first, because I've always wanted to travel to my paternal grandmother's homeland.

And second, to have had the opportunity to meet with so many students and who are doing such exciting work and to hear about your work.

It's been really fun.

And I also have appreciated the opportunity to reflect on my work and put it into the context of this concept of community self-esteem.

As my title suggests, this presentation is more about action than theory.

I'm interested in how Folklorists use their theoretical frameworks and skills to advocate for culture in

a way that builds community well-being and self-esteem and works toward cultural equity on the planet.

Now, before coming, I did a little research on David Buchan to know more about the man, and I actually identified a couple of other David Buchans.

That was really interesting. One is a sailing captain, an explorer.

And but I discovered, you know, so I discovered at least three intriguing men by that name, but found very much in common with your David Buchan,

the Ballard scholar with eclectic and wide ranging interests who understood the

power of narrative and the benefit of an interdisciplinary approach to culture,

as I hope my presentation will demonstrate. These are at the foundation of my work.

So thus I'm going to begin with a couple of stories. My first job after graduate school was at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles,

managing a project designed to identify master traditional artists in various Los Angeles

neighbourhoods and to bring them into the museum to display and demonstrate their work.

This experience gave me the opportunity to do fieldwork in Los Angeles, where a growing Southeast Asian community,

mostly Hmong, Vietnamese and Cambodian, were trying to make a home for themselves after the Vietnam War.

Now, as some of you know, I had been particularly impacted by the Vietnam War.

I did not believe we should be there. And I demonstrated against it when I could.

I wore a P.O.W. bracelet and watched with indescribable sorrow,

in April 1975, as our television stations broadcast the fall of Saigon,

I was deeply moved by the fear and the chaos so clear on the faces of those being left behind as people were escaping.

So it is no wonder that given the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Los Angeles, I gravitated toward the Southeast Asian community.

The first woman I interviewed was Hmong refugees from Laos. Pa

Yang was in her forties and had very little English literacy at the time.

So we conducted my interview through her daughter, as is often the case when working with refugees and immigrants.

I will never forget walking up to her front door in the densely packed urban neighbourhood and seeing the line of pairs of shoes on her front step.

I removed mine, knocked and was invited into her home, a long simple row house. Oh, it works!

There she sat in the light of the only window in the front room, working on an exquisite piece of reverse appliqué embroidery.

As I talked with her through her daughter, I learnt about the meaning of the symbols in the work, how these small,

discrete objects of women's work embody the history and culture of her clan and an entire community recently displaced by war.

The power of her artistic traditions to sustain and carry that culture across the world shaped my work for the next 40 years.

That experience also shaped my future collaborations with museums.

When we invited Pa Yang to show her work at the Craft and Folk Art Museum later that year, she did not come alone.

Instead, she invited many of her friends who also do needlework to join her and to share the attention and the esteem that the event was providing to her.

Together, they created a virtual crazy quilt of all the embroidery work on the walls,

the tables and just about every surface in the museum that was available to them.

And in that very simple action Pa Yang converted a moment of personal self esteem into one that accrued to her entire community.

In her book, *Indigenous Methodologies*, Margaret Kovach expands on the characteristics of qualitative research to propose a decolonising

methodology that encourages us to ensure a research design grounded in local epistemology,

to see stories as methodology and to plan our work with expectations of giving back to the community.

When I think back to that experience with Pi Yang,

I see very early lessons in honouring Hmong aesthetic sensibilities and paying attention to the local ways of knowing.

I would have hung those embroidery pieces as individual works of art in nice, neat, straight lines.

But she and her community preferred the collage effect with its visual pop and equitable attention to all the makers and their clan affiliations.

I also see an early lesson in considering how my resources and research might give back by addressing larger issues in a community.

I was singling out one person as 'master artist', a convention of the Western Museum world,

but that wasn't what was important to her. She sought recognition for her entire community.

Several years later, I was invited to meet a Cambodian weaver who had recently settled in Pennsylvania on my first visit to her home.

She was barely noticeable in the room, sitting quietly in the shadows while we talked with her daughter.

Bun Em had been a master weaver in her native Cambodia,

known throughout the region as the person to go to for a beautiful silk fabrics used to make traditional and ritual dress.

Her weaving held the community together, sustaining her culture and fostering well-being through cultural identity.

Families travelled for miles to buy her weavings for their daughter's weddings.

Yet in the United States, where her community was dispersed across a larger area and where they were focussed on becoming American.

She was little more than a shadow in the room. No longer did her community seek her out.

They were buying Western bridal gowns and ordering silk from weavers in the refugee camps, where their hard earned dollars went much farther.

On a visit to the state museum with a church volunteer, she saw a loom and her eyes brightened.

'I can do that', she told the volunteer. That volunteer saw an opportunity to make a difference.

So with her own resources she found a Swedish loom and encouraged Bun Em to begin weaving.

Now, I don't know if you know anything about Cambodian weaving, but Bun Em tried really hard to weave on that particular loom.

But it was nothing like the loom that she was used to, which is a 16 foot long loom that can manage,

you know, thousands of tiny silk threads that make up the dense, shimmering fabric over time with connections,

a little funding, and the support of the state museum. We were able to have a loom made for her and she put it in her basement,

which was under the house in Cambodia, in the basement in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

And she slowly began to weave again. Eventually, she started teaching, weaving to younger Cambodian Americans.

That recognition spread and families started coming to her house again to purchase silk.

Within five years, the shy woman received a National Heritage Award from the National Endowment for the Arts,

the highest honour our nation gives to traditional artists.

She came into full bloom on that stage during the award concert.

Charming even Charles Kuralt, a well-known journalist who was acting as the M.C. As her daughter

told me her weaving made her feel alive because she was finally contributing to her family's well-being again.

This is the power of traditional arts. Experiences like these have led me to the project I want to talk about today.

As the director of a graduate programme in cultural sustainability,

I am especially interested in this idea of community self-esteem and the connection between self-esteem and sustainability.

I worry about how we define these terms, how we gain support for them and how we measure them.

However, I believe we cannot sustain our culture if the members of that culture lack a sense of belonging. Many have argued, Peter Block and Bell Hooks among them,

that a sense of belonging is at the core of self-esteem and fostering a sense of belonging is at the core of what Folklorists do.

As Pa Yang demonstrated to me so long ago, community self-esteem begins with individual self-esteem.

The project I want to share with you today took place over several years and is still ongoing.

This is deeply engaging work that requires a commitment to the long haul.

My organisation at the time had pioneered two landmark conferences on refugee arts,

creating opportunities for state arts councils and state refugee resettlement organisations

across the country to interact for the first time and to find opportunities for collaboration.

After so much work at the state and regional level, though, I was ready to focus some attention on my community.

Since my really my earlier research had involved Southeast Asian artists, I decided to begin with refugee women artists, to begin with the familiar.

I started asking around and every time I turned a corner, someone mentioned Ho-Thanh Nguyen and the work she was doing with refugees.

So I finally called her up and we set up a time for lunch. At the time, Ho-Thanh was the domestic violence liaison for the local YWCA.

Her job was to connect refugee women to the services that the Y provided. Through her,

I was hoping to find a connection to artists within the community and to help those artists apply to our State Arts Apprenticeship Grant programme.

I believed that nurturing a practise of traditional arts might provide an avenue for expression and perhaps recovery and healing for these women.

This belief was partially fuelled by a potent statement from an Ethiopian traditional artist Tesfaye Tessema

who said, 'What people must understand is that this art is not just decoration.

It forms and shapes the human being. If you can come from a country where children are starving to death,

then you come to this country which is so rich you simply cannot explain why children are shooting each other.

The reason must be that they don't have their culture. Your culture makes you think like a human being.'

So I was hoping to use the resources of our grant funding programmes to support individual artists.

Ho-Thanh was looking for ways to create leadership opportunities for women struggling with resettlement and all its domestic issues.

It was not difficult for me to find common ground with this mission.

What Ho-Thanh understood intuitively and Elaine Lawless has demonstrated for us through her work with domestic violence shelters in Missouri.

Is that standard service programmes for victims of domestic violence are not enough.

In fact, in some cases they are self-perpetuating. This is more true when domestic violence happens in immigrant and refugee families.

Language barriers, fear of deportation,

and lack of understanding about what constitutes domestic violence in American culture all conspire to keep women from reporting these incidents.

Once they do, few programmes have someone like Ho-Thanh on staff who can mediate the cultural and linguistic maze of the American system.

So the opportunity to work with these women in ways that strengthen their sense of who they are

and place value on the skills they bring to our country and our communities,

and to honour their experiences easily fits into cultural sustainability work.

So after our lunch conversation in May of 2001,

Ho-Thanh invited 10 women from diverse backgrounds to her home to discuss ways they might work together to better address their needs.

She invited me to attend and to talk about our grant programmes. As we sat in her backyard sipping cool lemonade, I asked the women,

what are some of the most important art forms you have brought with you to this country. Unanimously -

Do you have an idea what they said, huh? -

Cooking! 'Our food', they said. Now, two things struck me about this response.

First, that they understood their food to be an art form.

And second, that they all agreed it was one of the most important aspects of their culture.

Now, let me interject here that to say that Ho-Thanh and I just offered a story circle workshop for attendees at the Fourth World Conference

of Women's Shelters in Taiwan a few weeks ago, and I asked that room the same question and was pleasantly surprised to receive the same answer.

18 years later and now you have confirmed it. And I would like to acknowledge that Ho-Thanh Nguyen is with me in the room.

You might be able to see who she would who she is. She is my dear friend and my collaborator on all of this work.

And and we were together in Taiwan. And so she's just joined me to come here this week.

So among the women in Ho-Thanh's backyard that day, this immediately triggered the sharing of all kinds of stories about food.

And someone said we should do a cookbook.

So for about six months, we collected more than 100 recipes from refugee and immigrant women and compiled them into a cookbook.

The resulting publication, however, is not just a cookbook.

Many recipes include a story from the contributor about the meaning of the recipe in her life.

The stories highlight the traditions, artistic practises,

rituals or customs surrounding the preparation and presentation, as well as the growing of food and dishes.

Some recipes are prepared solely for the celebration of a birthday and have accompanying songs and surprises to the delight the recipient.

Some are only prepared by men.

Readers discover that egg rolls are made in at least six different Asian cultures and have specific ingredients that distinguish them from each other.

I learnt that most Uzbeki women know at least five or six different ways to prepare pilaf and that many pilaf are only prepared on special holidays.

Mrs. Galperino's wedding pilaf, handed down from mother to daughter for several generations,

for instance, includes ingredients that have special meaning for the bride and groom.

Now, as Folklorists, we understand the importance of food. Food traditions in our communities.

As advocates for cultural equity and community self-esteem,

we find value in making these stories more publicly known to break down the barriers created by a fear of the unknown.

And food is a great way to do that, as we know. We launched the cookbook at a public luncheon where the women not only prepared and shared their food,

but many were encouraged to stand up at the microphone and say a few words about their food, their culture or their experiences.

This was Ho-Thanh's way of fostering confidence and leadership amongst the women.

Within a year, we had created a non-profit organisation called PAIRWN, the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network.

The mission of PAIRWN is to honour and enhance the lives of refugee and immigrant women and to empower them to live to their fullest potential.

PAIRWN is committed to, quote, celebrating the rich cultural heritage of our communities while honouring our differences and similarities.

And I love this quote, 'By teaching ourselves to value and understand our own cultures.

We learn the most important lessons of leadership, self-esteem, tolerance and collaboration'.

End quote, Not all of PAIRWN's members came out of the domestic violence programme,

nor has domestic violence continued to be a prominent topic of conversation in the group.

Rather, these women saw a need for all newly arriving women to gain the skills and self-confidence required for a successful transition to a new life.

The support and impact for victims of domestic violence is understood amongst the women,

and each woman has become a role model for the others in different ways, according to her abilities and resources.

Today, its members are women from all of all over the world who have made Pennsylvania their home. With Ho-Thanh at the helm,

my role has been as a Board adviser, though I have been cajoled to write grants, M.C. portions of their public events,

drive members to meetings, pick up supplies, develop and manage programmes, and even direct the reader's theatre.

Obviously, it's very hard to say no to Ho-Thanh,

but this is also an important way for folklorist to work if we are truly helping to make a difference in the communities that matter to us,

we have to be willing to dig in where needed.

PAIRWN now has a board of directors composed of refugee and immigrant women.

It took 18 years of volunteer work, but it now has its own office with paid staff, an archive, a kitchen and meeting space.

They have developed successful grant writing skills within the group,

produced 19 annual public luncheons to showcase their foodways and launched the story circle project

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to collect and share their personal narratives. Those narratives have formed the basis of an exhibition,

a short film, and two theatre projects. Building on the success of the food stories,

the women began meeting regularly for what we called Story Circles.

The more stories we shared, the more eager we became to share those stories broadly,

to find ways to change public opinion about their contributions to our community.

So we created the story project with funding from the States Local History Grant programme.

We identified almost 30 women with a diverse range of experiences, histories and cultures to participate, to participate. From the Bahamas to Vietnam,

the final group of participants reflects diverse cultures, ages, social class occupations, and religions.

We developed an interview protocol focussing on the role of women in community life and the changing roles of women in Diaspora.

My original plan was to train some of the women to do the interviews, but they ended up wanting me to do that.

So. So I did. And even though that wasn't my original plan, it actually offered some good continuity that we might not have had otherwise.

The monthly story circles have given these women the opportunity to practice their English and share common experiences.

They vary in attendance from 3 to 18, but each month the women are fully engaged in hearing each other's stories.

And of course, there's always food. The format is simple.

We pick a topic for the month and simply throw out a question.

In the beginning, I facilitated these conversations, but the women have taken over the process and made it their own.

They are eager to talk. Finding more in common than they expected.

It has been inspiring to watch as one story begets another.

In this circle of women drawing closer together in friendship and understanding as you,

Giovanna del Negro writes in 'Looking Through my Mother's Eyes', about the sharing of stories amongst her mother's Italian immigrant friends,

quote, 'In the span of several hours over coffee, amaretto cookies and liquor,

the kitchen was transformed into a dramatic stage where issues of motherhood, work, immigration and marriage were examined through stories.

The simple act of talking revealed a complex tapestry of meanings', end quote. In our case, the simple act of talking was creating a sense of belonging

many of the women had not experienced in a long time. With their permission, we recorded and transcribed the interviews and story circles.

Eventually, we brought in an exhibit curator, a filmmaker and a theatre educator to one of the story circles.

They each had read some of the transcriptions and offered recommendations about how

about how the stories might best be presented in their respective media exhibitions,

theatre and film. I thought we would choose one. I would write the grants to fund it and that would be our big project.

But these tenacious women wanted to do all three. So we did...and they have become intertwined into a multi-year project.

So the heart of the exhibition entitled 'Our Voices: Stories of Immigrant and Refugee Women' combined beautiful black and white portrait

photographs with short stories chosen by the women from amongst several

excerpted from their interviews. Let me tell you a little bit about our process, because I think it is in the process, as Tom talked about earlier,

rather than the product that we were able to build ownership,

a sense of belonging and individual self esteem. Using the method of reciprocal ethnography,

we involve the women in reading, editing and shaping any of the final product, such as exhibition labels and theatre scripts.

First, the women discussed a range of themes that they would like that they thought would be relevant to include in the exhibit.

These included humour, especially stories about language and confusing behaviour patterns,

getting used to the way that Americans do things or acculturation.

Moments of personal transformation. Courage to overcome incredible barriers in order to escape terror.

Motherhood in particular. Having babies without the usual extended family to help out and later becoming invisible in their children's lives.

And finally, the act of leaving everything behind. Once we.

Once we. Had all the transcriptions I went through every interview and excuse me,

pulled out several stories from each that might connect or illustrate to one or more of these themes, I shared these with each woman.

So she had the chance to approve, refine, reject or find a different story.

And we then created a small group of non immigrant women and asked them to read the stories and give us

feedback on those that stood out for them that told an unexpected story or made a powerful connection for them.

This allowed us to pair the stories down to about three for each woman.

We then pulled together a final selection of stories we thought would most broadly and inclusively reflect the themes they had identified.

Again, each woman had another opportunity to fine tune or reject the story and pick another one.

In the meantime, Ho-Thanh and I went to meet with the Chief of Exhibits at the State Museum to argue for them having for them to host the exhibition.

When we walked out of her office with with an opening date on our calendars, Ho-Thanh was noticeably elevated.

Tears glistened in her eyes and I was a little worried. But she explained, 'I had to leave my country because I no longer felt safe or respected.

And here I am in a new country where the official state museum is willing to put my story

on their wall for all Pennsylvanians to see', end quote. That moment still makes me teary,

thinking about how our work can have a significant impact on a person's life.

So co-curated by this unlikely group of women. The exhibit seeks to put a face on these new newcomers.

To that end, we also created a case filled with treasured artefacts.

Amongst other things, the case held a doll brought by a child,

a carved prayer given as a gift by a parent to a daughter as she was leaving, and a handful of soil from one woman's backyard.

The circle of chairs, each one hand painted by the women with motifs and colours that she selected, symbolises the

circle of women who have become a community beyond their own ethnic or cultural affiliations.

And during the run of the exhibit, we held public story circles groups.

whoops, which expanded the circle of participating women and increased the impact of the exhibition.

One person wrote in our guest book,

'This exhibition has given me a new understanding of my mother's life and the experiences that made her who she is today.'

A twelve foot long, nearly Life-Size group photograph reflects the sense of community that this process has fostered.

Finally, as part of the exhibition, we created an eight minute film which documented an afternoon at the museum with 12 women

painting wooden kitchen chairs that replicated the story circle concept in the exhibit.

This brought their real voices into the room, especially when they couldn't be there themselves.

And I'm hoping to share this film with you in a few minutes.

Alexandra Salazar writes about her own exhibit collaboration with the Cambodian community, quote,

'As a result of placing survivor narratives at the centre of the exhibits overall design and by providing the powerful tools of visual narrative,

the exhibit became a medium through which survivors could gain control over traumatic memories that can otherwise be disjunctive,

relentless and disruptive in everyday life'. Our exhibit, which opened at the State Museum on September 11th,

a date whose significance was not lost on these women, welcomed over 750 people in attendance.

The women brought food. We had performances. We did an opening ceremony that connected everyone to each other

and we celebrated the lives and experiences of women who go who often go unnoticed and more often feel invisible.

The next phase of the project was the theatre piece entitled 'Story Circle: Coming to America in the 21st Century',

the play took five of those stories and dramatised them in a one hour performance.

I especially remember our first conversation about doing a theatre production.

The artistic director suggested that she could develop their stories into a script and she would work with local actors to perform it.

At first, the women liked this idea. None of them is an actor, after all, they were feeling shy about the idea of actual performing on stage.

However, the more they talked, they realised they did not want anyone else telling their story.

So our theatre piece became very real. In collaboration with the theatre educator,

they met for weekly diction and improvisation workshops and worked together to write the final script based on their stories.

The piece recreates the story circle setting as if they are sitting around a table telling stories.

As the stories unfold, images and objects float in the lighting to make the story's tangible.

The women used mime freeze-frame imagery and monologues to convey their stories.

Some women also learn sound, lighting and stage management so they could be part of the process without being onstage.

And this moment in the play was always particularly poignant to hear these women say the very words said to them,

'Go back to your country', 'foreigner' to have them actually be saying that was really powerful.

We staged the play just six months later at a local community theatre as part of their celebration of women playwrights.

It was sold out every night and we offered talkback sessions afterwards to engage the audience in conversations with the actors.

The play was so successful that we restaged it in the auditorium at the State Museum during the run of the exhibition.

And this image depicts the final scene with a poem that was recited by one written by and recited by one of the participation participants.

This work is about much more than the exhibit or the play.

It is about the process of storytelling to understand one's own experience by seeing it in the context of understanding others.

It is about translating personal narratives into tools for social change.

The project has provided a safe place for these women to grapple with ways to present their feelings.

They understand the challenges of expressing important ideas in a second language and often help each other find the right words.

The story circles have created and often offer almost sacred space,

where these women who have to hold back in all other aspects of their lives can say what is on their minds,

because there is someone there who understands, someone who shares the experience.

One of the most amazing aspects of the work this work has been to see these women learn that, whether they come from the Philippines,

Russia or Uganda, they have all had similar experiences.

Whether refugees or immigrants, they have mourned their losses together,

laughed at their mistakes and shared ideas for dealing with insensitive attitudes in others.

They have created new traditions and a new sense of community.

In fact, they have said that the PAIRWN community is even more important to them than their own national or ethnic community, sometimes.

All of these programmes are drawn from ethnographic listening.

A process that gives authority to these women's experiences, reminds them of their strength and helps re-establish self-esteem.

These are often the untold stories of migration and exodus. Powerful stories of determination, change, survival and adaptation.

During a planning meeting,

one woman helped me understand when she said, 'This project is making me feel important for the first time since arriving in the U.S. two years ago'.

The daughter of another woman told us that 'this play saved my mother's life at a time when she was struggling every day just to get out of bed.'

As issues arise within the group, we return again and again to their personal narratives for stories that might

help to change people's attitudes towards newcomers in their neighbourhoods,

churches and workplaces. We often include talkback sessions and public and public story circles to give

audience members an opportunity to reflect on how the stories have impacted them.

During one of those talkback sessions, a participant bravely shared this statement.

'I always thought I was fairly open minded, but this play has made me realise the subtle ways that I still carry prejudices.

It has also given me strategies for facing those prejudices and trying to make some personal changes'. In my work with PAIRWN over the past 19 years,

I have taken my bearings from individual conversations and group story circles

to best understand the broader contemporary experiences or situations of refugee

and immigrant women. Well-being and personal dignity have always risen above the horizon as beacons,

guiding me, the ethnographer, safely into harbours of responsibility,

perhaps even as David Westbrooks says in 'Navigators of the Contemporary', 'to influence the exercise of power or at least better inform it.'

One of our more recent projects has been a reader's theatre called Magnificent Healing.

Different women participate

each time we perform it, sharing stories about their heart-breaking, and sometimes hilarious, conflicts with the American health care system.

We have performed this play for health care providers, students in medical school and health insurance companies.

And each time we make small inroads that have the potential to impact perceptions and policies.

If we end, if if we had time, I would love to read like just one of the first scenes of the play for you.

But we don't. This project has exemplified the shifting role of the ethnographer from one

of documentary documentarian and arts advocate to one of community activist.

It has been about trying to use my skills and the resources I have to make a difference in the lives of others.

Redefining my work by better understanding their needs,

taking bearings from their stories. Through narratives of migration, motherhood, courage and food,

I have seen the transformative power of story to create agency and resilience amongst refugee and immigrant women.

These stories and more illustrate our responsibility as cultural advocates to help build and foster community self-esteem and well-being.

Borrowing from Robert Cantwell's notion of cultural inalienable rights,

we understand sustainability in our M.A. programme to be about creating the conditions in which cultures can thrive.

Exhibitions, theatre, productions and films grounded in narratives and traditions of our communities,

are spaces where we create an opportunity for conversations to happen,

conversations that break down our fear of the unknown and open up opportunities for real understanding.

There is a deeply interwoven connection between what happens at the local level and the long term survival of the planet,

both culturally and environmentally.

If we cannot create the conditions for cultures to thrive at the local level, we cannot hope to thrive as a global community.

Providing the opportunity for communities to be heard, seen, embraced and included is what Rory Turner calls radical critical empathy. To sustain,

after all, is to be held from underneath. Turner continues,

'We must be able to have empathy not as a gesture of condescending appreciation, but as a lived experience.

If we are to sustain, we must hold this from below'. As Folklorists,

this is our work. By paying attention to culture and honouring its critical role in our sense of self,

we create the conditions for cultures to thrive. Hopefully it'll come out as we would, you know, picture it.

It's really pretty typical to be nervous about painting.

So I tried to break it down into a simple form.

So we did some exercises that involve drawing things with just triangles, circles and squares.

And I hope that that was a confidence builder. And we also talked about symbolism and how that is a quick form of communication.

We talked about colours and how you grow up in the midst of certain colours.

And I'm not really good at drawing. So I always draw this flower. And then I started making a heart and then turn it into an apple.

So I'm putting those in there. I'm painting this red, white and blue.

Red is for China. White is for Canada, where I grew up.

In blue is for the U.S. So each design has a meaning.

Girls were not allowed to date boys, but when they fell in love, this would be their way of expressing their emotions.

This is a common one that I see on the Kurdish rug. So I wanted to make that for you to work on it a little bit more.

So, we're from Moldova. And this is this is one of the traditional dishes. It's part of the former Soviet Union.

I remember growing up in eating, my mom would make it a special deal and probably eat a soup or a wooden bowl, which is designed just like that.

with the spoon and drink the juice from the cup?

No, no. I guess that's what the Russian tradition they used to carve everything out the wood.

And there's always gold - Russian churches, Russian dishes - it's all gold.

So we introduced gold in the design. Hello, these are snowflakes.

Birch tree. Symbol of Finland.

It's a lion standing on a sword showing how strong Finns are.

Well, what they've done for the most part has taken memories of where they grew up.

You know, some of them are telling stories like Sarla is telling a story about coming from India to America,

from going from one shore to the other shore. So on this one, I will be showing when I came as a bride to US.

So I'm trying to bring the concept that this piece is to like around the universe.

We are only one. Oh, yeah, my friend, she's Ecuadorian, but she's here in another section from Ecuador.

She's from the mountains and I'm from the coast. So she was planning to, you know, to paint the mountains and all that.

But she came with a perfect shirt that I needed. And I said, well, that's exactly what I need to paint.

I said, take off that shirt. So she gave it to me and I gave her my shirt.

So now I'm painting it. The design I have here is the rice field and the bamboo and the mountain in the back of the chair is a ocean.

I am seriously to tell you, I was I was thinking in my completely different thing, you were thinking of something completely different.

Yeah, I did. One night when I went I'm when I remember when I did the chair.

So a lot of working with people doing art is getting them calmed down because people are very intimidated by, now here.

People like Ho-Thanh who left Vietnam on this little boat during bombing and a war is intimidated by paint.

Yes. Are you happy with it? Yes, I am. I I'm frustrated in the morning.

But now I am. I'm done. This is a serious design. And this is a you know, like a kid-like.

Like, they might wonder why I have the two there. Maybe that's because I can move from one to the other easily.

You know, I could I could deal with serious stuff with, you know,

kind of like a design that makes you think versus a design that makes you smile and be a child.

Jobs away from husbands enjoy yourself

This is the best time. We don't have time to be together like this for many, many hours.

This is fun. I hope that they go to the whole exhibit and have chance sit on this chair,

this chair that we we tried to paint and we tried to tell our story in the way that they can go to our our book,

our album book, and they can read our story there and learn from us, learn from different culture.

And next time when you have your neighbour or someone in your co-worker at work is different than you, think about that.

How how the immigrant and refugee come to this country and how much they contribute to this country at the same time.

I would like them to read actually, not only my story, everybody's stories, and I would like them to read the stories,

look at the pictures and look at the paintings and kind of understand all the agony and then the difficulty we all went through to come here and

also to be able to stay here and do the acculturation process we had to go through and the difficulties we had to face and that we made it.

So I don't know if you noticed, we didn't put last names in the credits. We had several people involved in the project that were very worried for their lives or the lives of their families back home.

And so even in the exhibit itself,

we didn't use last names so that it couldn't accidentally somehow get back to families in their countries that they had had to escape.

So that's just one thing. And most of the women in this group self selected as coming to the museum to paint those chairs.

But obviously, it's a much bigger group. So... questions, comment?

Go on Claire, I knew it.

I've got millions of question but my practical question is: do you run Story Circle training that I could come on?

Yes! In fact, the workshop that Ho-Thanh and I were doing in Taiwan was a story circle training for

people who work in women's shelters so that they could actually use that process in.

That's exactly what we do. So we would Ho-Thanh and I would love to, you know, do something like that.

Yes. If you want. Yeah. Ok, that's one signed up!

All right. Anybody else? We'll come back. Yeah. OK.

Why chairs specifically, I mean, because of the story circle?

Yeah. You know, that's an interesting question.

The chairs were what were so that we could replicate the idea of a story circle and the museum actually made the,

you know, found twelve chairs that were exactly identical.

I love Sasha's comment in there about, you know, we all started with the exact same thing.

And they're all different. They're all unique. So I love that she has a like a eleven year old.

Got that, you know, in that process during the day. But yeah, I think I don't we haven't done suitcases, Ho-Thanh,

what other things have we done?

We've done quilts, we've done quilt, quilt squares and then created one large quilt out of everybody's individual quilt squares.

What other things? Stools I think we did stools one.

We sold jewellery to the people just to earn some money for the women...we did crochet...

Yeah we did. There's a very large more recently arrived community of Nepali refugees in the area.

And knitting and crocheting is a big thing that they do.

So we had several knitting circles with them, sewing circles and knitting circles where they made things,

and then we found opportunities for them to sell. I mean, there's so much more that we've done than what I was able to leave right now.

(Ho-Thanh) Actually we have tomorrow, the first global market...whoever wants to make food they can make food and sell and get the money for themselves.

They really like it now. People like to be a vendor because of the other way around.

You want to come up here? Come on. Two questions.

The first question for Amy is, I know some of the this was done as an independent, as part of your NGO before you were associated with Goucher

But have you encountered difficulty within what we call the academy with sort of convincing them that this is relevant work for

scholars and the scholars need not only look at books in the state library and actually go out and work with the community?

If so, how did you convince them that is actually relevant? Yeah, I know that's a good question.

So the the college where I teach and work is has a reputation of being a social, social justice focussed campus for many, many years.

And they're the first college in the country to require international study abroad for all students.

And they have a community based learning programme that is very extensive and works with across many of the centres.

So we don't have we don't have majors and departments anymore. We have centres that are interdisciplinary and collaborative.

Add to that the fact that our programme is really about preparing people to do

professional work in communities and all of our faculty are practitioners.

So all of those, you know, kind of create a landscape for this kind of work to be very welcomed.

Yeah. So they've been very excited. You know, we've done we've continued to do some of the reader's theatres,

and they're they're always asking me to make sure that I'm writing stuff about it,

that they can so they can post it in all the social media and stuff like that.

So so that seems you know, I think that they're I think they're really open to it a lot.

Well, the feeling is way mutual. I've obviously learnt way more from you and you have for me.

But anyway, I did teach grant writing skills to you guys. And they I'm so proud because.

How much is that Grant you guys got? What was the one from OVW. (Ho-Thanh) OVW grant that we got \$300,000. Everybody's so happy...we have life-coaching

We have seven seven women from different countries.

You know what they do? It is wonderful people asking for that.

But now we have a global marketplace.

We have no office and we work from home or meeting at the coffee shop.

and sometimes it's not really safe because a lot of the women want confidentiality

And that's a little hard. Now we have an office and we are helping all the other obligation.

they can use our office to do, whatever they need to do.

And you will know. Well, my goal and my vision is a centre for all

the organisations can be part of the office there.

And there are just one short one stop shop.

The resource that we need, we need to reach all of them. Our women have a hard time to find the resources

And that's why I quit my job and created this organisation to be a bridge to be sure a woman would find us.

With my husband's help. Without your family's support you cannot do it, you cannot do that alone.

And I know this, you know, I went home when I went to do a keynotes speaker.

one time about human trafficking at the college. And it was a beautiful day.

I came home. I went to do this speaking. And I came home, I.

I talked to my husband and I say, you know, I have something to talk to you about

And he said, you can tell me, no, no. But you know me so well, he said, 'you planning to quit your job?'

I said, Well, if you let me do it, can you support me?

What I'm doing. I will. And he knows me so well.

And you said, yes, I will support you. And one day I came into the office and I wrote a letter and I said 'bye', two weeks later, I'm out. Involved full time on the PAIRWN

Yeah. And, you know, I think the very, very early desire to create services for women that that really look at the whole

woman and not just a particular issue or problem is exactly what PAIRWN does now.

So it's fabulous that they've been able to achieve that, you know, achieve that goal and that mission.

What do you do? You probably did, actually quite a bit of it.

It rather awkward as I move the camera back to you. But obviously, you were, you'd already done quite a bit of it on your own.

And I'm just wondering what your reaction was when Amy came to you 19 years ago to describe your project.

But how did you react to that and how did you approach it?

I am eager to learn what time I was young. Oh, yeah.

And I just want to create an organisation so bad.

And I did not know how those how they would be supporting me now that I was still working full time job.

When Amy came and talked to me, we just clicked

We worked on the pipeline for and we just want to talk about it because, you know.

It protected it from the refugee woman. And if anybody come and talk to me all you know about get involved, I talk with other women, get involved.

My, my. Like I said, hackles might fight.

I think the word you're looking at. Oh, your antenna antenna that you help people not get to be using us

for their good. Whatever it may be. And we've had this happen to us.

after Amy helped us, this happened to our women and I get really frustrated and I have to make a call.

But with Amy she's so sincere and sees it, I don't know.

That day we just talked and just clicked and we said 'ok, let's go together'. And we start with the first story circle

And we spoke about the food and we OK, a couple.

We like a cookbook. We had \$2000 for that cookbook

Now looking back, how many years ago? 18 years ago? It's good.

It's nice to see it and there's momentum there because every recipes they have a story why they want to put their recipes in a cookbook.

But the cookbook is so cheesy, so cheap right now, we are ready to do another cookbook.

But we have to do a better one. You know, I said before, Amy, I learned a lot from Amy and vice versa,

Amy knows a lot about us too and all the woman in our group, love Amy and every time we do something, we always seek her advice.

And we always ask her. OK, this programme is coming. What do you think?

How can we do better? Because, you know, we we just cannot just say, oh, random said all the time.

I'm thinking about what we do and what the women need. But 18 years ago the women needed a different way

Now, with their kids, with their children older and you think the way. The newcomers still

struggling with English as a second language, the job, the driving car or whatever they need.

Social service. And children go to school. But we have like double one with the elderly.

We have that again. You don't have to deal with all those things because the elderly right now in that area from 10-3pm, they're home alone.

They have they don't know anybody. And we have senior programme from 10-3pm.

We get them together. We play bingo.

We took them out to different places. We ask them to tell stories, we have a story circle, and we using that.

to let the children know. It's getting good.

Good. They've totally taken it and run with it.

It's fabulous. (Tom McKean) Well, I think we'll finish up with the formal bit.

But please, speaking of foodways. Join us for some Scottish foodways.

We have Smoked salmon and some interesting cheeses from Scotland.

Lovely oatcakes from Portsoy. That boat-building place that I mentioned.

So please join us, then talk to each other and learn more about each other.

Maybe tell each other our knowledge of our story of some kind. So please join us over there.

You. So thanks very much to our thank you again.

At the World Women's Shelter Conference, we are planning to further.

It's not just in Taiwan only and there's not only one.

We are looking right now to go to in the United States.

We're going to go to some 50 States.

So sign up for our mailing list and take the little catalogue of public events with you but do come join us there.

And on the 23rd of January we celebrating our 25th Anniversary so please come to the Elphinstone Institute, ground floor of MacRobert Building, come into the library...