

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO PROMOTE CERVICAL SCREENING IN IRELAND

BY SOPHIE MULCAHY SYMMONS

ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED WITH CÚAN CUSACK

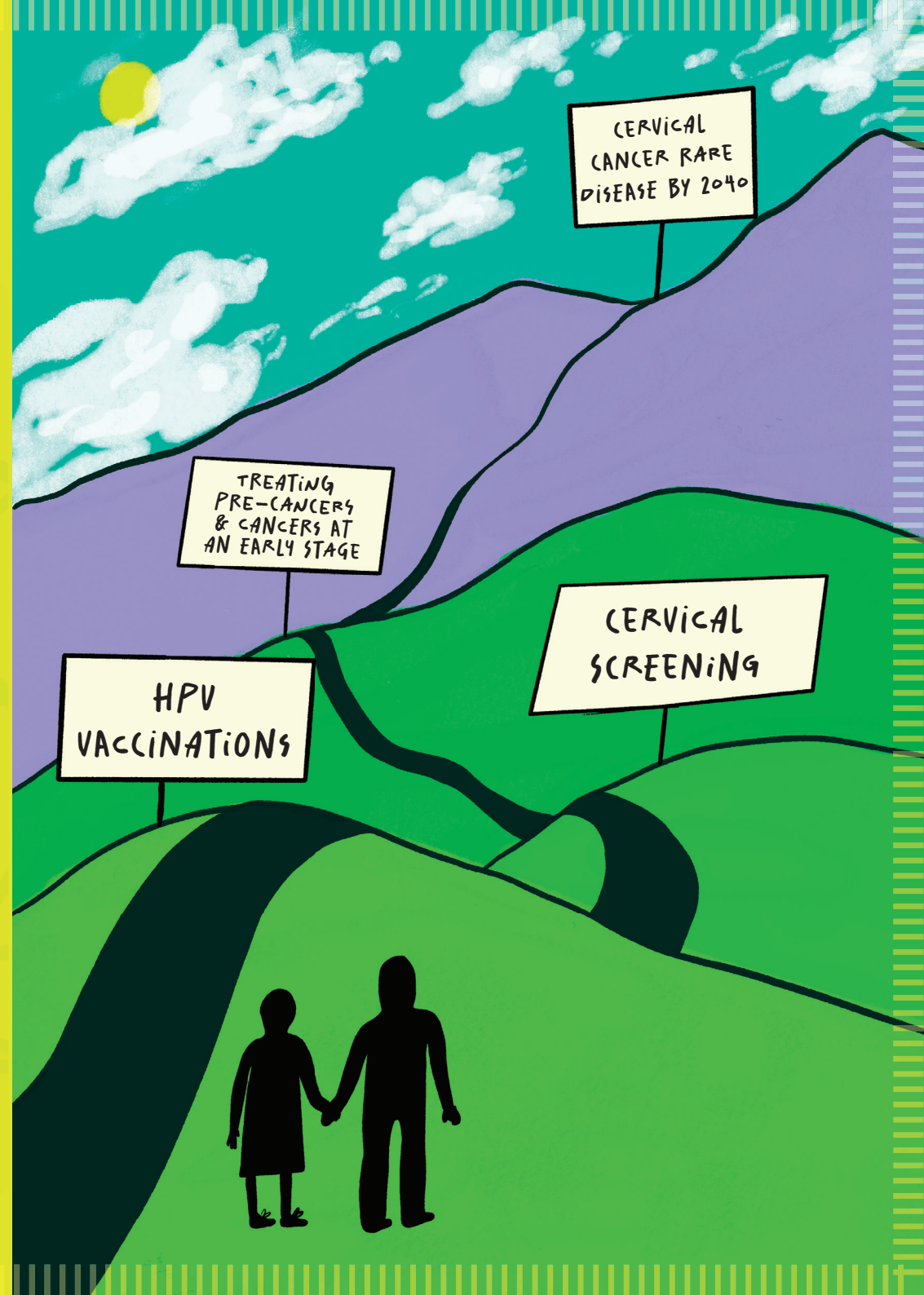


WHY is it important?

Cervical cancer is a preventable disease, it is preventable by ensuring everyone has access to vaccination against Human Papillomavirus (HPV), an infection that causes cervical cancer, cervical screening, and treatment at an early stage. As it is preventable, it can become a rare disease, meaning fewer people will be affected by it. The World Health Organization set a global call to action to make cervical cancer a rare disease and Ireland is aiming to achieve this goal by 2040.

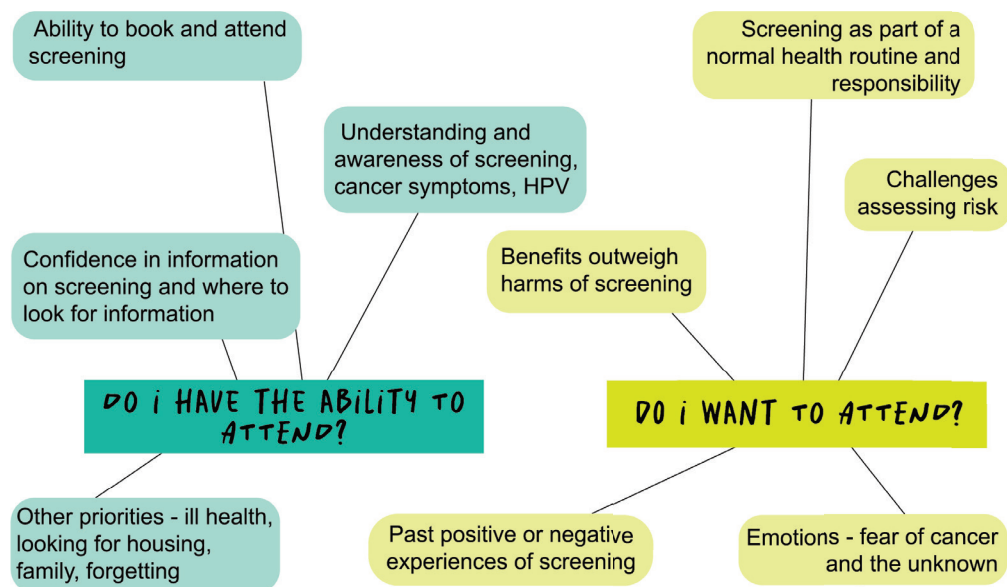
Although cervical screening is freely available to women and people with a cervix aged 25-65 in Ireland, not everyone goes and some communities have a higher risk of cervical cancer and are less likely to attend screening.

Sophie's PhD research explores the reasons why some people don't attend and how they can be supported to attend screening to ensure cervical cancer becomes a rare disease for everyone.



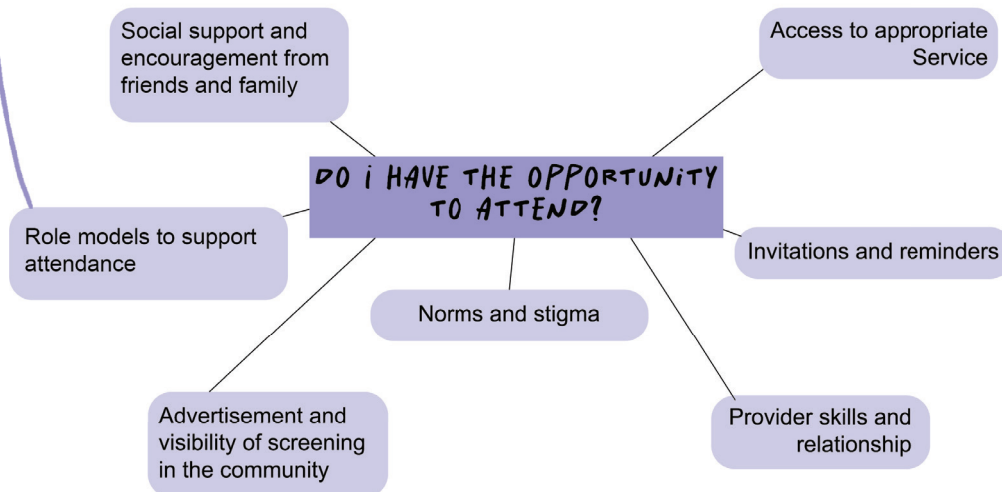
Through Sophie's research, she found that people who work in low-waged jobs or are not working, have not gone to university, and who live in cities are at higher risk of cervical cancer and less likely to attend screening. She interviewed sixteen women from this demographic group about their experiences and opinions of cervical screening. The reasons why people **attend** or **don't attend** screening are complicated.

WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR ATTENDING



WHEN YOU BECOME HOMELESS IT'S HARD... YOU'RE NOT GETTING, THERE'S NOTHING REGULAR ... SO STUFF LIKE THE SMEAR TEST IT'S ONLY UNTIL IT BECOMES IN YOUR FACE, OR WHEN YOU HAVE TO YOU KNOW. LIKE IT JUST DROPS DOWN THE LIST OF PRIORITIES.
- UNDERSCREENED INTERVIEWEE 1

OR NOT ATTENDING CERVICAL SCREENING?

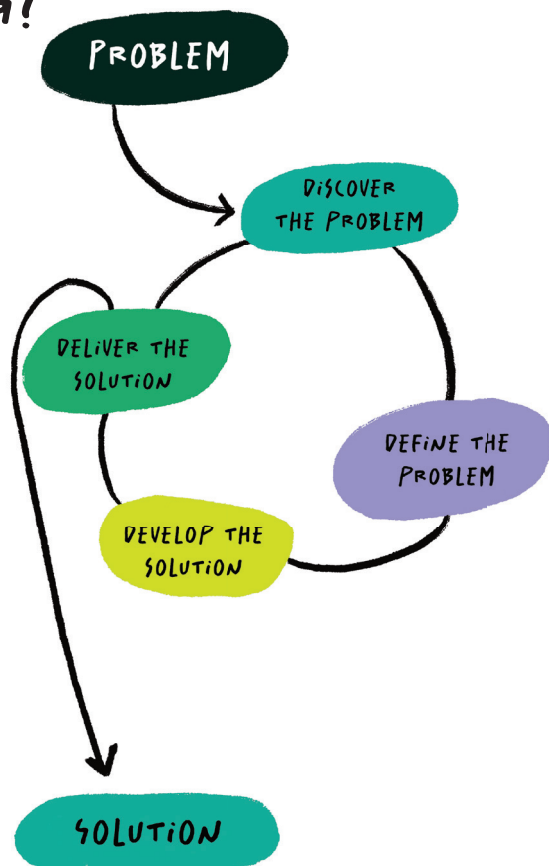


I CONSTANTLY ENCOURAGE MY DAUGHTERS TO GO. SO LIKE THAT YOU KNOW IT'S, I'M PUSHING THEM, WHEN I WOULDN'T HAVE WENT MYSELF REGULARLY. BECAUSE IT WAS JUST TABOO.
- UNDERSCREENED INTERVIEWEE 2

THEY FOUND CANCER CELLS AND THEY REMOVED THEM AND BECAUSE I THOUGHT GOING BACK IT WOULD BE ONLY BAD NEWS, I NEVER WENT BACK.
- UNDERSCREENED INTERVIEWEE 3

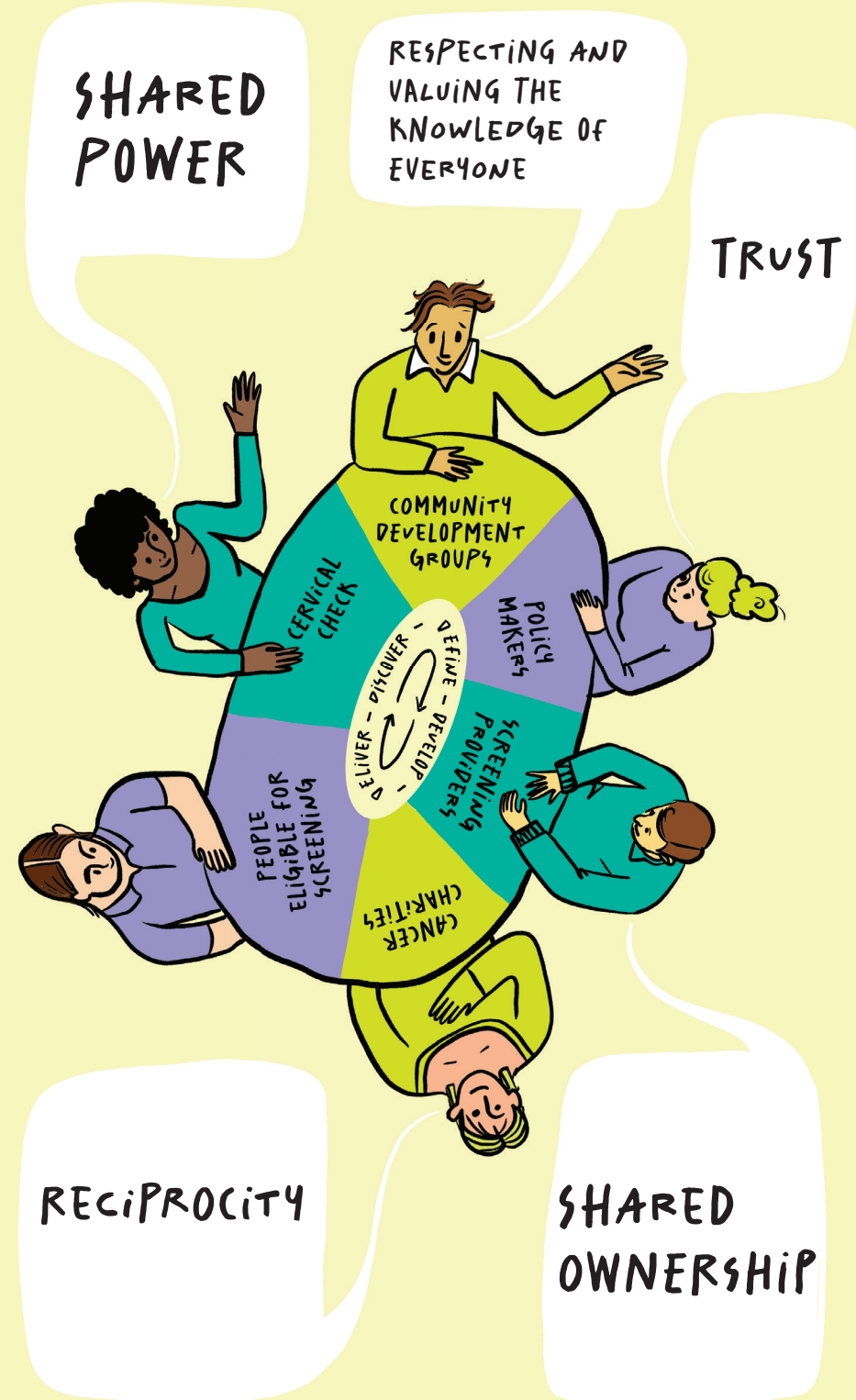


HOW DID WE FIND SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE SCREENING?



Sophie used an approach called co-design which ensures everyone's voice is heard and respected to develop a solution to the problem. Eight women living in inner city Dublin formed the co-design group and were equal partners and decision-makers in the project. Over four workshops, Sophie asked what mattered to them and how they wanted to promote cervical screening in their community.

At the workshops they prioritised the main challenges to attending screening, came up with lots of ideas to promote awareness and attendance, and developed two solutions to promote screening in their community. The solutions were tested with other people who work in the community and are involved in planning and providing screening to see if they thought the ideas would work.



WHAT HAPPENED AT EACH CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP?

DISCOVER

PRIORITISED MAIN PROBLEMS

Visibility in the community
Emotions of fear and anxiety
Knowledge of screening
Limited peer support

DEFINE

CAME UP WITH IDEAS TO PROMOTE SCREENING AND VOTED ON FAVOURITES

Supportive peer networks
Promote during national awareness day
Education as early as possible

DELIVER

DESIGNED TWO SOLUTIONS

Coffee morning
Underwear tag campaign

DEVELOP



SOLUTION 1: COFFEE MORNING

The first solution was to organise coffee mornings in community centres where women can ask a community health worker or their peers questions about screening and address their concerns in a friendly atmosphere. The co-design group also designed a poster for the event.



Free coffee morning Let's talk about cervical screening

Have a coffee and a chat about cervical screening with a local nurse



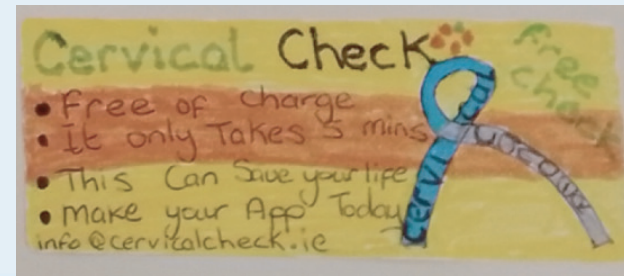
Date | time | place

Check when you are due screening at cervicalcheck.ie

Host
organization logo

SOLUTION 2: PROMOTIONAL TAG ON UNDERWEAR

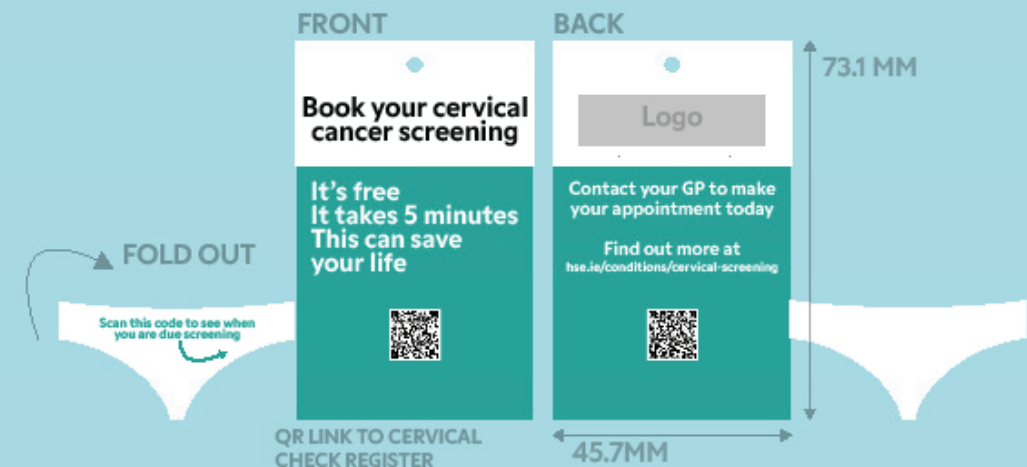
The other solution was a campaign to make a tags promoting screening and attach them to underwear in clothes shops. The tag would have a link to the online screening register so people could easily check their eligibility and if they were due screening.



Mock up of the design drawn by the the co-design group



First draft of the design based on mock up



Final draft of the design based on feedback

IMPACT

The co-design group designed really unique and creative solutions to raise awareness of cervical screening. By working together, the solutions are more likely to be successful as they are tailored to their community and empower people to consider screening. It is important to partner with communities so their experiences are valued and their knowledge can have a positive impact for their community.

The group were proud of the work we did and are now talking to their friends and family about cervical screening and promoting it. This means we are ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to attend screening and contributing to cervical cancer becoming a rare disease.

I'M TALKING TO MY FRIENDS ABOUT
IT BECAUSE SOME OF MY FRIENDS
WON'T GO FOR A SMEAR TEST



SCAN THIS CODE WITH YOUR PHONE TO WATCH
A VIDEO ABOUT THE PROJECT
OR VISIT [TINYURL.COM/YVHU2T48](https://tinyurl.com/yvhu2t48)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The two co-designed solutions to promote awareness of screening could be tested in the community to see if they are effective. Below are some recommendations based on the main findings of the research to improve the cervical screening service and promote screening among women less likely to attend:

- More visibility and advertisement of cervical screening is needed in the community. Advertisements need to be clear that screening is free, that you can register and see when you are due on the online register, and that you can go to any healthcare provider who is registered to provide screening.
- Community-led sessions can provide people with information to address their concerns, and should be organised in collaboration with existing community groups.
- Healthcare providers can opportunistically promote screening with their patients. They may require training to support culturally sensitive communication with their patients surrounding cervical screening.





Sophie Mulcahy Symmons is a researcher at University College Dublin who is studying cervical screening awareness and promotion among communities less likely to attend screening in Ireland for her PhD. She is interested in reducing health inequalities and promoting health and well-being by using approaches that engage with communities.