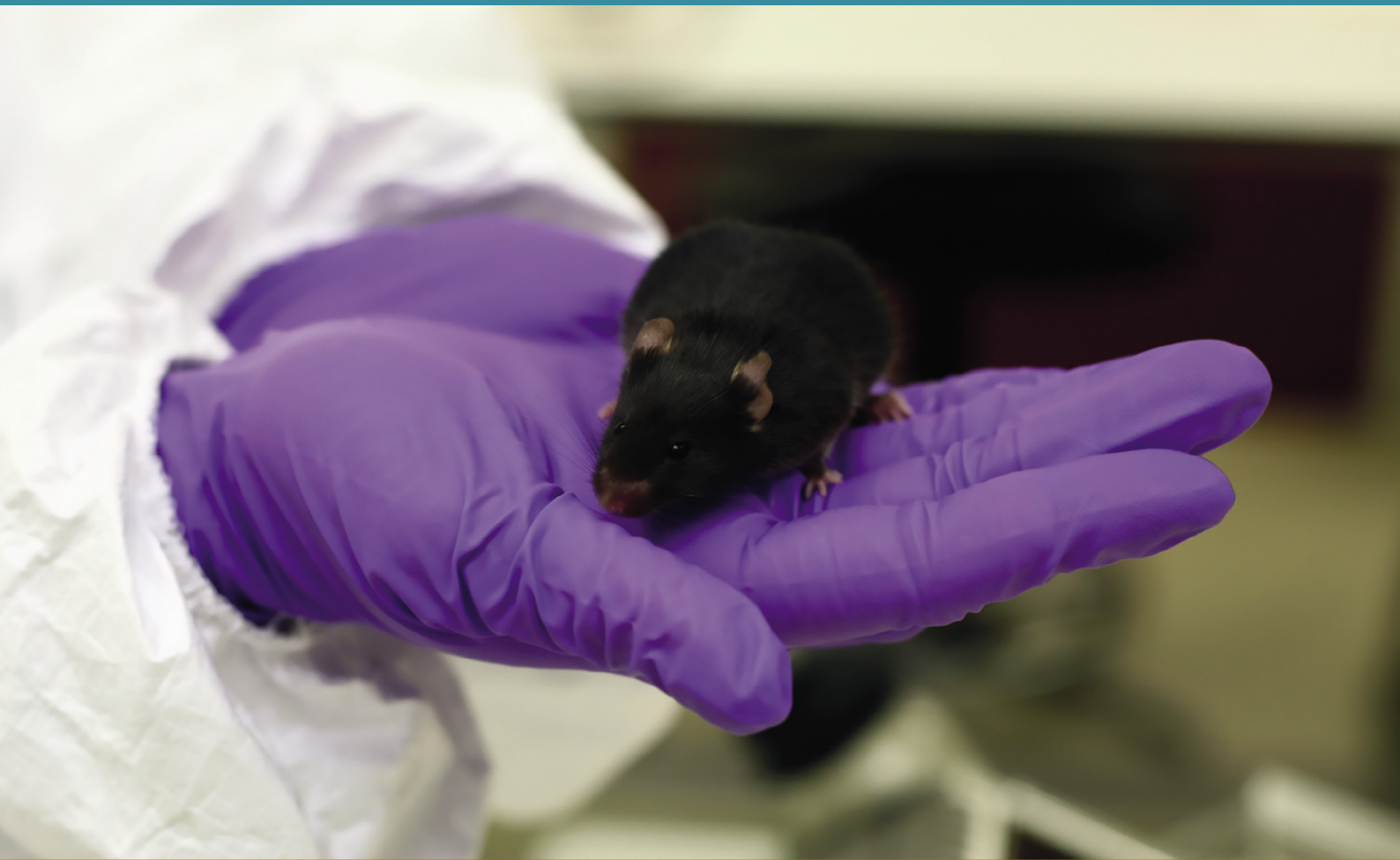


Care-full Stories Phase II: Developing a new resource for teaching a *culture of care* in animal research facilities

Project report

November 2022

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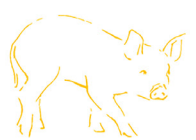
Executive summary

This report describes the development, piloting and evaluation of a two-to-three hour training exercise that uses storytelling to reflect upon the culture of care in animal research establishments. It builds on the training resources originally developed in Phase I of the Care-full Stories project (Greenhough and Mazhary 2021). The project uses fictionalised prompts (storytelling) as a training resource to encourage participants to share their own stories of working in animal research. Sharing stories facilitates connections and the development of a shared culture of care across different communities within an animal research facility.

The aim of phase II was to further develop and pilot the Care-full Stories training resource. In particular, the second phase of work included:

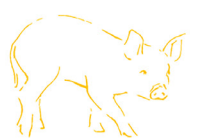
- Two focus groups with early career researchers which informed the development of the new scripts;
- The development of three new scripts focusing on the experiences of early career researchers, the pressures of working in a client-focused environment, and the differences between lab and field research;
- The addition of a further new script on running patient tours developed by the AnNex Exeter team;
- An additional eight pilot sessions, including both online and in person training workshops at universities, private and public sector research facilities and professional lab animal meetings;
- The promotion and sharing of work-in-progress at national and international forums, including the Annual Meeting of the Institute of Animal Technologists (UK); the 2022 Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations meeting and the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Laboratory Animal Science.

Feedback from the pilot workshops indicated that the workshop was very effective at promoting open dialogue and discussion: 55% of respondents referenced the act of sharing, whether sharing themselves or sharing with others; 92% of respondents agreed that the workshop was successful in encouraging them to “see things from a different perspective”. Development points included the need to provide further support and follow-up resources after the workshop, and we have added some suggestions in this vein to the ‘Instructions for Facilitators’. The final phase of the Care-full Stories project will be to make all our resources freely available for download online and to disseminate these resources to the wider animal research community.



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1. Background and rationale

The publication of the Wellcome Trust's (2020) recent survey on research culture reflects a widespread recognition of the need to create a more supportive working environment in the UK research sector. Within the animal research sector this is evident in a growing commitment to creating a culture of care. This is not only promoted by regulators of animal research in the UK (Home Office Animals in Science Regulation Unit Compliance Policy, December 2017), but is widely recognised as being key to the welfare of both staff and animals in animal research facilities, and to the quality of the science produced (Boden & Hawkins, 2016). Research has highlighted how existing infrastructures and training provision within animal research facilities, while sensitive to the need to promote a good culture of care, are currently struggling to meet the gap between formal mechanisms of delivery and the more open, deliberative, cross-cutting conversations needed to really articulate shared meanings, values and experiences of care (Davies & Lewis, 2010; Greenhough & Roe, 2018; Hawkins, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Friese & Latimer, 2019; Tremoleda and Kerton, 2021).

Research by Professor Greenhough and her colleagues as part of the Wellcome-trust fund Animal Research Nexus (AnNex) project suggests that for animal technologists and facility managers sharing stories about their workplace experiences served as a way of thinking through the ethical and emotional challenges of their work, including what counts as good care (Greenhough & Roe, 2019). Inspired by this, between December 2019 and March 2021 Professor Greenhough (Principle Investigator) and Hibba Mazhary (Research Assistant) brought together a group of key stakeholders in the animal research community, including Co-Investigator Dr Manuel Berdoy from Oxford's Biomedical Sciences Division and creative professional Ida Bergl ow Kenneway, to design and pilot a new training resource, successfully demonstrating how storytelling offers an innovative approach to teaching a culture of care.

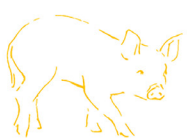
The original training resource consisted of a set of instructions for facilitators, (with a suggested agenda, warm up exercises and discussion points, as well as advice on creating a safe space for discussion) and three different scripts users could select from. In the session, volunteers read out the scripts, ideally taking on roles different to their usual position in the workplace, and then collectively participants talked through a series of discussion points the script was designed to raise. The resource was designed to be adaptable to the specific needs of the group using it, and to be used 'off the peg' by those providing training in the sector. Despite some delays and challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, including the need to move to online delivery, feedback from pilot studies conducted in Phase I was overwhelmingly positive (Greenhough and Mazhary 2021).



The aim of Care-full Stories phase II was to build on the success of phase I and work towards the long-term goal of seeing the Care-full Stories resource adopted into training programmes at animal research establishments across the UK and Europe. Care-full Stories Phase II had five specific objectives:

1. To develop further and refine the resource through the creation of at least three new scripts which focus on (i) the experiences of early careers researchers; (ii) the experiences of those working in the private sector, with a particular focus on client pressures; (iii) the experiences of international researchers/those who trained outside the UK. Focus groups, in addition to materials collected by the Animal Research Nexus project, would be used to inform script development.
2. To conduct at least six further pilots of the training resource, face-to-face if possible. (While this resource was designed to be used with small groups, face-to-face, ongoing Covid-19 restrictions during 2020–21 meant some planned Phase I pilot studies could not take place, and others took place online.)
3. To produce professionally and publish digitally the training resource.
4. To identify or develop an online platform where the training resource can be distributed and, if possible, use this to monitor uptake and gather further feedback on the resource.
5. To continue to disseminate and promote the resource across the animal research sector.

This report focuses mainly on objectives 1 and 2, the development and piloting of the additional training materials, but will also provide an update on progress against objectives 3 to 5.



2. Development process

2.1 Focus groups and script development

To inform the development of the new scripts, we conducted two focus groups with early career researchers at UK universities and one interview with someone working in a commercial facility. Using the insights from the focus groups, the interview and additional materials from the AnNex project on research in Places Other Than Licensed Establishments (POLES) and the pressures of client-facing research, we developed three new scripts.

Story 4: Not just the two of us

A conversation between two early career researchers outside the room where the meeting of the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) takes place. One researcher has just left the meeting, another is about to go in. This script explores the conflicting pressures that exist for early career researchers as well how institutional differences can have an impact on their work.

Story 5: Under pressure

An email exchange between an animal technologist and their line manager, this script explores the pressures created by the pandemic as well as pressures related to being part of a more isolated group within a facility, such as a team focused on breeding, and working to contract for clients.

Story 6: Wild thing

A conversation between two friends meeting in a café, one working with animals in the wild, the other lab-based. The exchange explores the complications around translating care for animals in the lab to a wildlife context, the cultural, institutional, and international differences that play a role in that, and how welfare is measured differently in lab and field settings.

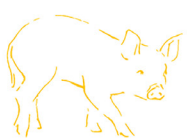
A further script was generated by the Exeter AnNex team (Gail Davies, Richard Gorman and Gabrielle King) using data from their research exploring patient engagements with animal research:

Story 7: Who is it all for?

Patient and public engagement and involvement can play an important role in shaping the funding and the relevance of animal research, but it needs to be carefully planned from an early stage, as this script illustrates.



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2.2 Stakeholder consultation

Throughout the process of developing the new scripts we drew on the advice and expertise of our stakeholder group (see acknowledgements), including one meeting to read through and provide feedback on the draft scripts (March 2021) and a second (September 2021) to update everyone on progress and gain input into the choice of pilot study locations and strategies for evaluation and dissemination.

2.3 Pilot workshops

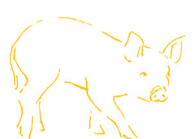
We conducted eight pilots of the training resource between October 2021 and June 2022, involving 69 participants. These comprised: (i) two online sessions as part of an animal research Project License Holder (PPL) training module involving only academic researchers; (ii) one in person session at a university facility with a mixed group of senior and junior researchers (including postdocs and PhD students), animal technologists and named persons, (iii) one in person session at a medical research facility with a mixed group of managers, named people and animal technologists; (iv) one online session at a university outside the UK with a group of animal care staff; (v) two in person sessions at professional meetings of laboratory animal technologists and (vi) one in person session at an European meeting of laboratory animal professionals.

The workshops were structured as follows:

1. Each workshop began with the facilitator offering an overview of the aims and expected learning outcomes (see box 1) for the session and creating a 'safe space' by asking that participants do not share the specifics of 'who said what about whom' outside the space of the workshop.
2. A short icebreaking activity was then used to try and create a relaxed and informal mood for the workshop.
3. This was then followed by script readings and discussion. Facilitators were encouraged to ask for volunteer 'readers' for the roles in each script. These readers received the scripts shortly in advance of the exercise. The activity worked best when volunteers read a role different from their own. Each script featured suggested questions for discussion at the end, but facilitators were also encouraged to allow the conversation to flow and range beyond these. The first script reading was followed by a short comfort break and second script reading.
4. At the end of the workshop participants were asked to write their reflections on an online interactive whiteboard or via feed-forward postcards.



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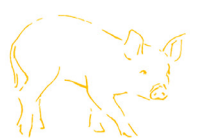
Box 1: Learning outcomes

At the end of the training session participants should be able to:

- appreciate that there are different kinds and understandings of care for both humans and animals within a facility;
- share examples of a positive workplace culture and think about how this could be further developed;
- be aware that there can be shared responsibility (without loss of individual responsibility) towards animal care, welfare and use;
- understand how they can promote effective communication between different roles within the animal unit;
- consider examples of (un)empowered care staff and veterinarians, and provide suggestions to help make people comfortable about speaking out and sharing their concerns;
- encourage respect for different roles, people and priorities within a research facility;
- recognise the emotional division of labour within animal research facilities, and the implications of this for their and their colleagues' wellbeing.



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3. Reported benefits

Prof. Greenhough (project lead) led or observed seven of the eight sessions and took notes to assist with the development of the training resource, but these did not include participant names or other identifying details. When an individual other than the project lead facilitated (n=2) they filled in a facilitator feedback form at the end of the session. All participants were also encouraged to fill in a feedback survey immediately after the event, although only around 29% (20 out of 69) did so. This section and the one that follows (4. Development points) draw on material from the feedback survey and observer and facilitator notes, as well as feedback shared as part of the reflection sessions at the end of each workshop.

3.1 Sharing stories

“ Talking helps – you are not alone. ”

“ Sharing experiences is powerful therapy! ” (Post-it feedback responses)

The mostly frequently cited benefit of the session in this round of pilots was the opportunity to share stories. When asked what they enjoyed most about the session, 55% of respondents referenced the act of sharing, whether sharing themselves (“I really enjoyed the open space to share feelings about working in a research environment”) or sharing with others (“listening to other attendees’ anecdotes”). A similar idea that featured prominently was an appreciation for the openness and honesty of the environment, valuing “how easy it was to share ideas” during the session. The term ‘open’ was mentioned in 7 out of 20 responses (35%) to the prompt asking what participants enjoyed most out of the session and was the most commonly used word in these responses (see Figure 1). The term ‘open’ appeared ten separate times throughout all the feedback.

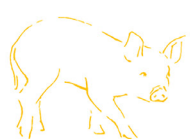


Figure 1: Word cloud generated from all the responses to the prompt ‘what did you enjoy most about the session?’



“ ...Having more open discussion about this topic [culture of care] is the best way forward in general. ” (Online survey response)

The icebreaker activities were effective, especially for groups who did not know each other well, and helped to create this open space for sharing, with the facilitator for one of the sessions noting that the ‘Draw an animal’ activity in particular was very successful in making participants feel comfortable. Some groups who knew each other well or who had been working together for some time, (e.g. as part of a training course), felt these exercises were less necessary. Participants were also reassured by being given scripts to read, as improvising role play could be “intimidating”.



3.3 Valuing different perspectives

“ I enjoyed getting to hear other peoples’ perspectives. I am used to only talking with techs, so it was nice to hear from a student/researcher.” (Online survey responses)

Another common takeaway from the session was appreciating the perspectives and expertise of different roles in animal research. The session impressed upon participants the importance of “*finding common ground,*” and “*...remembering that people generally care and it is helpful to try and understand the other’s perspective before assuming that they don’t.*” One respondent enjoyed the opportunity to “*listen to others’ feelings from a variety of perspectives*”, whilst another appreciated the sense of “*empathy between teams/roles*”. Ninety-two percent of respondents believed that the workshop was successful in encouraging those occupying different roles in an animal research facility to “*see things from a different perspective*”.

3.4 Adding value

Fifty-six percent of respondents reported that they had not attended any previous culture of care training. Compared to other training, this exercise was perceived by one participant as “*more personal/experience based*”, whilst another “*felt this would stick in my head more.*” The words often used when participants were asked how this training compared to other training on culture of care were that it was more “*practical*” and more “*interactive*”. One participant said that this training was unique in bringing in “*emotional care*”. Seventy-nine percent of respondents agreed that this activity gave them new insights into the culture of care, making one respondent “*more determined to make time to research more on PPL*”, and prompting another to “*think about the care of animals as well as how changes to the project are affecting the techs involved*”. One respondent commented that, whilst not gleaning any new insights, they found it “*definitely... reinforcing*”.



4. Development points

4.1 Providing support and follow-on resources

One area of improvement highlighted in one of the workshops was the fact that the subject material could be sensitive and potentially triggering. One participant became upset and had to step outside during the workshop. It is therefore important to create space for this and to direct participants to counselling resources/services.

“The participants were left with high emotions (probed by the Scenario questions) with no Resources or coping strategies. They then had to return to work and I felt as though a debrief was required.” (Online survey response)

One respondent also felt it would be helpful to provide resources to deal with the scenarios presented in the workshop:

“It would be nice if this progressed into offering resources and tools on how to cope with these different roles and how to collaborate in a more effective way so that we are all getting heard.” (Online survey response)

We have included some recommended follow-up resources as part of our guidance for facilitators in response to this, as well as prompting facilitators to think about how to tackle heightened emotions that may arise as a result of the sessions. We also consulted our local occupational health team, who suggested that for the most part such reactions are part of having a “normal” response to distressing issues, and the general consensus nowadays is to acknowledge the normality of those responses and not over complicate them

4.2 Workshop location and group composition

There were some constraints on the ability to share stories, which is a key aim of the workshop. Two out of seven online survey respondents from one pilot workshop said they did not feel comfortable sharing experiences and opinions, with one saying that “I was sitting in an open plan lab space so didn’t feel comfortable to share with the people in direct ear-shot!” The other expressed that they had “a hard time sharing in front of large groups of people”, and preferred “smaller groups for discussion/sharing”.



In addition, whilst the variety of roles present can be a strength (and something that several participants praised in their feedback), this can also constrain sharing. Whilst stating that they appreciate the value of having a mixed group, they added: *“I think there could also be value in having a workshop without supervisors present. People might be less willing to share their opinions when the boss is around.”*

In contrast, several participants felt that the attendees were not diverse enough in terms of roles, and cited the need for *“a more rounded group”*. One participant agreed strongly that the workshop achieved its aim of encouraging people to see things from a different perspective, but added *“We were still mostly technicians though so I think it would have been beneficial to have more students /researchers”*. A perspective that was seen to be overlooked was that of the research student; four out of seven online survey respondents in one group directly mentioned the need for more inclusion of that role. Other roles mentioned as needing more representation were Principal Investigators (PIs), vets / vet technicians and the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB).

“ ...One perspective that I would like to see represented is the research student [...they are a ...] key player that falls right in the middle of a lot of the interactions between researchers and technicians and their perspective is often forgotten or overlooked. It can be very isolating working as a graduate student and I think they could use the support. ” (Online survey response)

4.3 Workshop length and structure

One participant commented that the workshop felt *“a bit incoherent”* and suggested:

“ Perhaps it could work better if you read through or played videos of a few short scenarios (different topics, need not be acted out) and discussed what the individuals are/aren’t doing right and what they could do better. [University’s] compulsory online training modules on inclusivity / diversity pulls this off well. ” (Online survey response)

Another limitation was the length of the workshop; four separate attendees from the same workshop (out of 11 attendees) believed that the session would have benefited from more time. Alternatively, one facilitator noted that, *“We went for a 2h session and ran two stories. This was about right for us. I think we could have struggled to get participants to commit to a 3h session – at least for the first workshop.”*

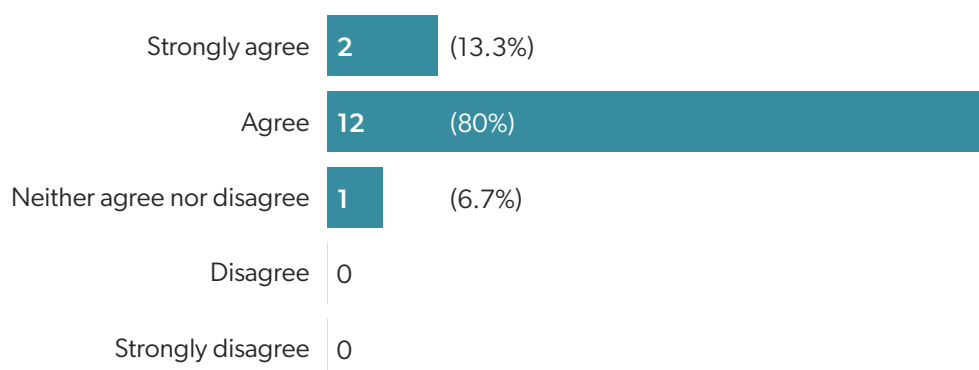


5. Follow-up survey results

In September 2022 a short, anonymous follow-up survey was sent to all participants who had been involved in either phase I or II of the Care-full Stories project. This was completed by around 17% (15 out of 86) of participants across the two phases of the study. While we would have liked a higher response rate, the responses from those who did participate were very encouraging, providing evidence of the longevity of the learning gained from participating in the workshop. The mix of respondents was well balanced between those attending the workshop online (53%) and in person (47%), and included a mix of senior researchers (13%), early career researchers and postdocs (13%), managers (27%), animal technologists (27%), and named people (20%). The majority of respondents (67%) had participated in workshops between January and March 2021, so had participated in a workshop over 18 months before completing the follow-up survey.

Eighty percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the session was memorable (Figure 3), with one respondent explaining how *“having that break and ‘stepping’ into a new role allowed a broader view of animal welfare and research”*. Ninety-three percent agreed or strongly agreed it had given them new insights into the culture of care (Figure 4): *“I realise that everyone ultimately cares, just maybe expresses this in a different way”*, while 73% had changed their working practices in following their engagement with the workshop (Figure 5). For example, one respondent stated that they learned *“to take a step back before coming to another member of staff”* allowing them to be *“more open minded and less influenced by emotion”*.

Figure 3: Responses to the prompt ‘This session was memorable.’



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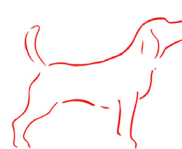


Figure 4: Responses to the prompt 'This session gave me new insights into the culture of care.'

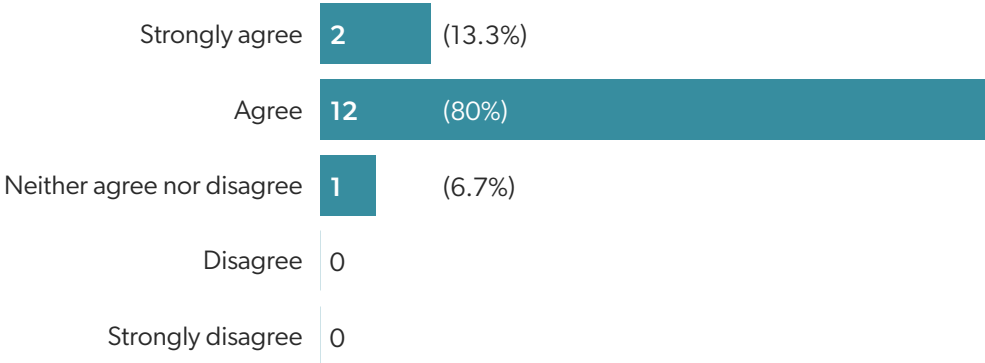
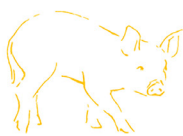
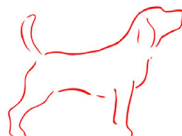
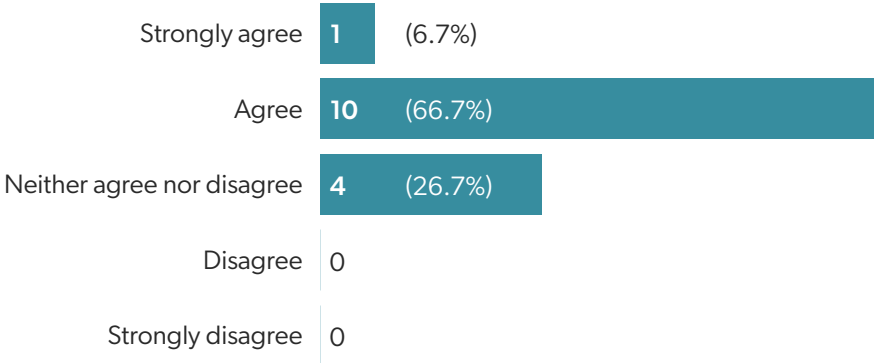


Figure 5: Responses to the prompt 'This session changed the way I approach the culture of care in my workplace.'



6. Conclusion

“ Despite being a little apprehensive about getting participants (not all were volunteers!), it went extremely well. We shall certainly run more workshops; they had the desired outcome of encouraging dialogue between senior managers, scientists and technical staff and identified some follow up actions. ” (Workshop host, Phase II pilot study)

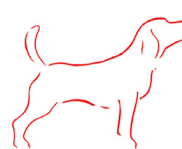
This project has fully achieved its stated objective of further developing and piloting the Care-full Stories training resource to help those working in the animal research sector to recognise, participate in and promote a culture of care in their working environment. It also speaks to the wider AnNex project objective of generating new cultures and spaces for communication within the animal research sector.

We now have a complete package of training materials, including seven different scripts, instructions for facilitators and other supporting materials. We also have a growing evidence base from the pilot studies that these resources are effective in creating space for those working in animal facilities to reflect on their culture of care, stressing in particular the importance of good communication and being able to appreciate how others in their workplace may have different experiences and perspectives.



7. Next steps

The final phase of the Care-full Stories project will be to make all our resources freely available for download online and to disseminate these resources to the wider animal research community (objectives 3-5). We have already shared preliminary versions of the materials at meetings of the Institute of Animal Technologists (2022), the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (2022) and the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (2002), and with the International Culture of Care network and the North America 3Rs Collaborative, amongst other stakeholders, and we will draw on these networks to promote the resource. We will continue to encourage users to share feedback on their use of the resource to allow for future development.



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About the research team



Dr Beth Greenhough is Professor of Human Geography and Fellow of Keble College, Oxford. Her research examines the social implications of scientific innovations in the areas of health, biomedicine and the environment. She is one of the lead researchers on the Animal Research Nexus project and has led the development of the Care-full Stories training resource. She has published widely on topics including the culture of care and everyday ethics in animal research. She is co-author of *Bodies Across Borders* (Ashgate) *Health Geographies: A Critical Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell) and *Bioinformation* (Polity).



Hibba Mazhary is a part-time PhD student at the School of Geography and the Environment. Hibba first entered the department as a BA Geography undergraduate in 2013, before going on to complete the MSc in Nature, Society and Environmental Governance. She divides her time between fieldwork, teaching undergraduates, and undertaking various part-time research assistant roles, including working with the RSPCA on laboratory rat welfare. Hibba is broadly interested in animal welfare and food sustainability.



Dr Manuel Berdoy currently works at the Division of Medical Sciences, University of Oxford in the fields Higher Education in pre-clinical sciences, Experimental Design, Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare. He is the lead Named Training and Competency Officer at the University of Oxford, and winner of the RSPCA Sir Patrick Moore Award (2016) for outstanding contributions to the understanding of laboratory rodent behaviour.



Acknowledgements

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