

NARRATIVE SPICES IN CONVERSATION

Reflective interviews with human rights practitioners

ABOUT

In 2019, **JustLabs** and the **Fund for Global Human Rights** launched the Narrative Hub. For several years, we worked with teams of practitioners from four human rights organizations in Mexico, Hungary, Venezuela, and Australia. Each team explored research on narratives, imagined creative changes in their practice, and experimented with bringing those ideas to life through projects and learning processes.

This document contains interviews with each team about their initiatives, the process of experimenting with creative narrative practice, and the lessons they learned.

Each participant was interviewed individually. Team members' interviews have been woven together into a single conversation, which has been condensed and edited for clarity.

For more information on the Narrative Hub—including resources, tips, and reflections on narrative practice in the field of human rights—see our publication [*Narrative Spices: An invitational guide for flavorful human rights.*](#)

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MÉXICO | CENTRO PRODH – CENTRO DE DERECHOS HUMANOS MIGUEL AGUSTÍN PRO JUÁREZ

Can you briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a word or a phrase that represents your experience with JustLabs?

Sofía: My name is Sofía de Robina. I'm a lawyer in the international department of Centro Prodh in Mexico. My organization supports people—victims of human rights violations. In a word, in a phrase, my work involves "accompanying people [who have been] victims of violations" and the work with JustLabs has been "experimenting in order to connect".

Xosé: My name is Xosé Roberto Figueroa. I'm from Mexico. My work is what gives me joy every day and makes me want to get up and help more people. The work with JustLabs has been, in a word, "awesome." And if I could say more, I would say that it has been a process that has refreshed all of my tools and even my way of seeing human rights from another perspective.

How would you define narratives?

Sofía: I think it implies, above all, a story—a way of telling a story. It's like telling a story in such a way that one is not simply telling it and letting it hang in the air, but rather that there is really some sort of connection between who is receiving the story and what is behind that story. It's also a way of positioning oneself in relation to the story.

Xosé: There are thousands of ways to tell a story. Looking for new narratives is about finding the best way to tell a story, about deciding which story will catch the audience's attention the most, so that they begin to empathize with what we want to communicate to them. It's not just talking for the sake of talking or saying something and leaving people to try to catch on, but rather directing a specific message at people.

Tell us a bit about the project you were involved in.

Xosé: It has been a two-part process. First, we started with a project on the National Guard, which is a project about militarized police in Mexico.

Sofía: The current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, had just won the election with an overwhelming majority. For us, it was a great opportunity to say that, in part, the people had come out to reject, among other things, a security model that has generated more war, more violations, more disappearances. Therefore, our message was a message of hope—hope that a different model was possible, one that was more personal, more humane, more in line with rights and dignity.

Xosé: We wanted to explain why the police should be civilian and not military. We initially planned a whole project and even produced a video for the campaign.

Sofía: We mostly tried to experiment a lot, to explore what method or what words and images we needed to use if we wanted to deliver this kind of message.

The president and the government quickly went in a different direction from what he had been saying during his campaign. Instead, they moved towards—and they continue to promote—a completely militarized security model. The opportunity for us to act started to close.

Xosé: So, we decided to put all our energy into another important project in our country, which involves support for the disappeared. We decided to modify our project on narratives in order to give a voice to people who are searching for their relatives. We want to tell these stories through different artistic projects, and to be able to tell these stories in a way that people can hear them and want to hear them.

Sofía: We always talk about how, beyond the end result, perhaps the most important thing has been the process, because we acquired all these tools and they impacted our work in other ways—even if, in reality, the video didn't necessarily achieve what we wanted.

What were some of the challenges you encountered in this process?

Sofía: We had to break free from many old habits related to how we do communications work. Above all, we had to pay attention to, for example, the processes of listening, creating focus groups, and using the feedback we were getting. That was very difficult because when you have an idea and you think that it's the way to go, you may—and this is exactly what the project allowed us to do—need to experiment with the process and see if what you wanted is really coming through.

The other challenge, I think—and in general this is difficult in our work—is that there are many stories of suffering and many stories of helplessness; they are very heavy, very painful, and we never want to trivialize them. The challenge will always be how to tell them in an accessible way that generates empathy without diminishing, hiding, or minimizing the pain and all the complex weight that many of these stories contain.

Xosé: It's very difficult to find a perspective from which you can tell the story while, at the same time, making it so that the person who's listening, as soon as they hear the word *desaparecidos* (disappeared) or as soon as they hear about the suffering of the families, they don't look the other way. In other words, that they don't stop looking at what you're showing them. That they really listen to the message, that they take in the story, but that they also want to do something to support these people.

Sofía: For me, I think it reinforces something that in itself—it's something that we already try to convey at Centro Prodh, that this process made even more evident—which is that behind the pain there's always a lot of strength, and in some way that strength offers hope because it shows the resilience of this country in its efforts to fight for and to seek justice. So, I think that making sure that that's always clear, not only as something we believe in but as something that has to be put out there for others, is also one of the things that has stayed with me the most.

That balance is incredibly difficult. What are some of the ways you're trying to change how you tell those difficult stories?

Xosé: For me, it's always a very powerful experience talking to the people who are searching for the disappeared. They are people with incredible fortitude. I'd like to be able to communicate all that in the materials that we're going to create; I'd like for people to learn about this strength that those *buscadoras* (searchers) have.

Sofía: In many states around the country the majority of those who disappear are men; however, the majority of those who search for them are women. They are women who have taken a stand in order to confront not only the pain, not only the

injustices, but also the sexist discrimination in the country. We produced a report, but to a large extent what we wanted to do was to show that these are tremendously strong women who have kept going despite the fact that everything was against them. We didn't want to just say how vulnerable they are or how many things they have to deal with, but also [to show] how their way of facing it—including the fact that they're women—enables them to make connections through empathy, through love, through seeking solutions, in a way which is different and powerful.

Has this affected any other areas of your work?

Sofía: One campaign we did, 'Breaking the silence against sexual torture', was to raise awareness about cases of sexual torture of women. This campaign was created in 2013, but after the project on narratives we saw that it needed a monumental overhaul.

We were telling extremely painful stories that weren't getting us anywhere at all with people. We were putting a lot of our frustration out there, but it wasn't getting anywhere. As a result of this project, we had a discussion about how to make it better. We made numerous visual modifications to the way the campaign itself was presented: we changed the colors we used, we made illustrations of each of the women in a way which was powerful and made their strength and resilience more evident, and the whole campaign was supported by new ways and means of telling the story.

Looking back on the narratives project, is there anything you would have done differently?

Sofía: I think I would take away the focus on the president in our original project. Of course, you can't deny that he's a key figure, but perhaps I would not have focused the narrative so much around him and the window of opportunity that we saw with him because, well, this is very weak strategically and at any moment, as indeed happened, out of our control, the context can change and the opportunity can disappear.

I think I'd also consider something that we're trying to keep much more in mind for this new stage of the project: how to have spaces for feedback, for listening, for focus groups at strategic moments, so that they really happen at times when they can have an impact on the evolution of what is being created. I think that [having space for feedback] helped a lot in the previous project, but I was left with the feeling that it could have been useful to have done in other moments or other additional spaces as well.

What were some of the things you've learned or are taking with you from this experience?

Xosé: The main thing is not to give up. Another is that if a door closes on you, to look for a way to open it. That's what the people searching are like: they face many things, doors suddenly, sometimes literally, close on them, but they find a way to open them again—or they do everything in their power to try. They have the tenacity to look for new tools. A couple of years ago, some of women searchers from the north of Mexico told us that they'd raised some money together between them to buy a drone and found someone to teach them how to operate it. And now they're doing field searches with a drone; people who probably had no idea how to even turn on a computer or how to use a program; now, they are now using drones to search for their loved ones.

Sofía: I think one thing is to never take things for granted. You can always innovate and change and modify. If we believe that the world can be different, then we also have to believe that our strategies can be different. And I think that—especially when you are already accustomed to your way of working, and sometimes even in the face of pain—you become mechanical and only do things in a certain way. In my work, I consider whether what I'm doing at that moment might be better done differently. I even listen to other people to get their take on it and often reformulate strategies.

The project also reminded me of the importance of always keeping other areas of life nourished, such as creativity—those playful spaces that are often lost in day-to-day life. And the importance of networks. It is important to always nourish and maintain networks. Professional networks, but also those outside of work; it's spaces like these that will allow us to make better connections in what we do.

Xosé: The truth is that it has really reinvigorated us regarding the way we approach communications. For example, we've learned not to release anything without having it assessed first, and to have a clear picture of what it is that we want to communicate. Usually, the urgency of the situation pressures us to produce materials. And now, with JustLabs, we have learned how to be more creative.

Sofía: I realized that I really enjoy all the work that's related to communications. Learning better ways of communicating and sharing what we do is just as important as having a good legal strategy. As lawyers, in general, it's very difficult to get us to open up to new things. When we look at proposals from colleagues who work in communications, it's usually us [lawyers] who say, "Ah, but who knows if that will work."

How do you each open yourselves to creativity?

Sofía: I think that music is very important—I mean, there are moments, which I am experiencing more and more often, where playing certain music allows me to get away from the hustle and bustle of the world. I also like to draw, although I'm quite bad at it. But I like it. I like to have a lot of colored markers and so on. For example, I have these mandalas to color. And I like to read a lot. And ride my bike.

Xosé: Many of the things JustLabs shared with us have helped me. Meditation is something that I had never really tried, to be honest, and I really enjoyed learning about it in this process. Learning this new way of taking a break, of being able to calm my mind and to ask myself what I need, was very eye-opening. It's one of the things I try to do when I need to access that source of creativity again. Also, extracurricular activities help a lot; for example, this year I started pranayama classes, which has also helped me a lot as regards being able to calm down at times when we're under pressure or in a rush. I've also learned to look for different answers in different places, and to not always look in the same places. For example, painting, building, assembling, even designing things that have nothing to do with human rights—that helps me a lot in finding the answers I'm looking for.

Xosé, one of our creative sessions together involved origami. You told us afterwards that you enjoy creating origami and that you used to do it with your family. If you were to create a new origami figure to represent your experience in this project, what would it be?

Xosé: If I could make a new figure... I'd really like a heart with wings because I feel that the heart is always where it should be when you're working on human rights, but the wings allow us to go further. You [JustLabs] are precisely what allows the heart to get to that place and to stay there.

Is there any advice you would give to someone starting out in narratives?

Sofía: I think I would say that it's extremely important. That nowadays communications is an essential part of our work. In a context where there seems to be so much external noise, finding ways to make sure that what we say makes sense and resonates with people is so important so that we don't get stuck in our bubble. And that finding new narratives that are vehicles for telling people about what we do in a way that is more accessible and easier to digest, can even be a way

to build bridges and to avoid becoming isolated. And that to experiment and if you get it wrong, it's okay—you can always learn through the process.

In the future, what do you think you'll remember from this experience?

Sofía: I think the importance, again, of experimenting. In many cases, experimenting shakes us out of our day-to-day routine as regards the way we normally do things. It reminds us that creativity needs to be a tool we use more consistently in our daily work.

Xosé: I'm going to remember the people a lot. The truth is that our friends from JustLabs, and our colleagues from other organizations who we've participated in workshops with, have given me a lot, personally. Listening to them is so gratifying for me because you can see your own stories reflected in theirs, or you hear about things that you might encounter. You can learn a lot from these processes. The work of renewing oneself is also really going to stay with me. Rather than sticking with how you usually work, renewing yourself and learning new skills.

HUNGARY | HHC – HUNGARIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Can you introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about your experience with JustLabs?

Anikó: I'm Aniko Bakonyi. I live in Budapest, Hungary, and I work for the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. I'm a human rights defender.

Detti: I'm Bernadette Nagy. I'm from Hungary and I'm working for the Hungarian Helsinki Committee in the communication group as a fundraiser and community organizer. The best part of working with JustLabs is, I think, experimenting because we usually can't do this in our work.

Anikó: There's this one object on my desk—this little bird. [Holds up a small red sculpted bird]. It's a sculpture.

We did this campaign in front of this screen on my desk, so I always saw this bird. But this bird is like freedom, the ability to fly—to be somewhere else. And I just thought that this campaign was something like that for the organization.

How would you define narratives?

Anikó: It's the way you present a story; the way you frame a story. It's a kind of storytelling. It's a way to explain something when you want the other person to see your stories through that perspective.

Detti: Narratives make a story recognizable and memorable. This is why it's important to use them. Because we want people to remember us and connect to us somehow. A narrative generates feelings and makes it easier. I see it as a psychological thing.

Tell us a bit about the project you were involved in.

Anikó: Last year we spent a lot of time, thanks to this JustLabs project, experimenting with how to convey our messages, how to give a different story, how to form a new narrative towards our audience. It was very interesting because it gave us a big scope, and also was something new for me. But this is really important for us, because we see that there is a kind of fatigue towards the way that we used to talk about our work. We cannot gather new audiences with our previous messaging, so I think it was a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to experiment and find new ways.

Detti: First, we tried to find new target groups and different channels to communicate and also new ways to share the messages we have. We decided to turn to young people. We think it's important to make these young people more conscious about what is happening in the country. So, we did a lot of research to get to know them better. We wanted to know more about their political attitudes: Are they active? Are they passive? Are they even interested in these topics? Which platforms are they using on social media? What are they interested in? What problems do they have with this kind of stuff?

Anikó: So, we were looking at young people between the ages of 18 and 24 and we were trying to find messaging that

catches their attention...which was challenging in the sense that, as a human rights organization, you can't really have very different messages. We couldn't be much lighter in the sense of the issues that we are dealing with. But still, we had to find a way to reach younger people on the channels that they use.

Detti: We found two agencies. One made the ads for us in this campaign and one was thinking with us about the creative content. Now we have a really cool landing page with a lot of creative content from youth ambassadors who are pretty different, creative people from the same age group that we were talking to. We got tattoos, gifs, stickers, videos, and podcasts, which we collected on this landing page. We are thinking of how to continue this work. We want to use some of the slogans they found and we want to get in touch with some of the ambassadors again because they are really talented and they helped us a lot. And I think they really understand what we are working for here.

Now we also have these offline events and it's just very, very different from the online space. When you talk directly to a person—and not just in general about your topics—you really have the chance to ask them questions, so it makes it easier to personalize your message. Even if it's a small group, you just see who you are talking to and you can try different things.

We are visiting some festivals and other events. We had this game where young people could try themselves in police situations, like identity checks or interrogation. What can you do? What are your rights in this situation? They really enjoyed it. We also enjoyed it because we had these costumes on and handcuffs and everything. It was just really new. When you try to show how a policeman acts lawfully in a situation, it just looks like something ideal—something which doesn't look real.

The other one was this debate game. We had two topics that the players could choose to discuss. The first was about the main task of the prison. Is it about punishment or the reintegration of the inmate? The other task was more about rule of law, democracy, and legislation.

Anikó: We have two big things still within this cooperation. One is the internal mainstreaming of our work. During a staff retreat, we led two sessions devoted to our communications strategy, where we shared with the entire team the experiences of our narrative work. We discussed how we could mainstream our narrative work and in what way we could change our communications.

The other one is the call for ideas to refresh our brand. We have devised a brief for a design agency to help us rebrand ourselves. We wanted our new image to reflect the changes and show the organization as approachable, friendly but still strongly holding on to its core values. We also thought that it was important to reflect this change in the story of the logo and the woman representing our organization.

What was the experience of this project like for you?

Anikó: It struck me as a very different kind of cooperation than what we normally have, because in a sense it was very free. We could frame most of the content and also the boundaries. We could ask for help when we needed help, but we could really experiment with lots of things; I think it was a very elevating process in that way. It's not something that happens very often. This was very different because the process was important as well, not just the outcome. I think that's a very different perspective.

Can you tell us more about what it was like to connect in-person with people at the festivals?

Detti: I'm really proud that we made these and we were really successful. You know, you can reach 10,000 people online

in one day. You can't compare this to 20 or 50 young people at a festival. But you can talk, be friendly with them, and it means something different when you reach these people personally. People were asking for opportunities to volunteer for us and just—wow. I'm just proud to have made this happen.

What were some of the challenges you encountered in this process?

Detti: Mostly we communicate online. And there are always new platforms and new kinds of tools that we need to learn to use. But the people who we are communicating with, they sometimes look like they live in a different reality. We are living in the same country and we still don't speak the same language sometimes. It's not easy.

Anikó: We had lots of choices and then we had to make decisions. Who's the designer? Who's the ambassador? There were many of these milestones. And you can never be sure that you have made the right choice. I think, for me, that was the most difficult part.

Detti: We had the two partners for the online part of the campaign. And one of these partners was really difficult to meet in the middle. They had something in their mind and we thought something different, and they were just not really flexible. We really tried many times to explain to them why we are doing things differently. At the end, we couldn't really understand each other.

Anikó: We worked with the ambassadors for our online campaign. We were very careful in picking them and, you know, with some of them it worked better than with others. But we really had no idea about how to do this before, so this was something completely new. But I think this is something that we will try to do in the future as well.

Working with external partners can be a big challenge. Is there any advice you have for others who are trying to do this?

Anikó: I think it's a good thing when you have to work with outside agencies because you really have to be clear and vocal about who you are and what you want. And this was a long process for us, because when you just work with your colleagues, many of the things are kind of evident. You don't need to say them. But when you have someone coming to help you, first you need to be very clear about what you do and why you do it. I think we could have shortened this first part of the cooperation with the creative agency if we had clarified this more for ourselves in a digestible format.

Did you have any favorite partnerships from the process?

Detti: We became fans of one of the ambassadors who made us these animations, which are really cute. And he was not just creative visually, but it was really easy to make him think creatively about our topics. He had great ideas and we didn't need to tell him exactly what to do. I'm really just waiting for the moment when I can write him the next email about the new work.

What have you learned, or what are you taking with you from this process?

Detti: First, I think that our work can be really important for this young group. And the other thing—our ambassadors. They surprised me. They really read a lot and they were curious about our work. So this is another thing—if I just call somebody because I like what they are doing, even if it's a little bit far from our stuff, then I can trust that they will be open.

In this campaign, we've changed the language we use in public communication. And we needed some kind of balance. We

can't act like teens and we also don't want to lose our professional voice. But we need to be understandable for a 20-year-old. This is something that I think we've found and I want to keep.

Anikó: I think this was super refreshing, I would say, in every sense. How very differently you can approach things and how you are able to convey maybe the same message or a similar message very differently. And that we are able to talk to a younger generation, which might be able to understand the importance of what we think is so important. You feel less lonely when you see that other people are also with you.

The other important lesson is that it's interesting if you make a mistake, it's not a tragedy. You don't want to make mistakes in general, but I think there is a lot to learn from them.

Can you tell us a bit more about how your team's way of communicating has changed?

Anikó: There is an accepted way of talking about certain issues that we deal with. These are often very sad, tragic events. The conventional or usual or accepted way of discussing, let's say, human rights abuses is somewhat different from how we do it. We represent more the human side of the story. We dare to show not only the rational arguments but also the personal and the more emotional ones. We don't talk about, you know, Article 3 violations and all that; we try to explain it in a more approachable way, and we feel okay with that. That's a big shift, and we are not fully there, but I think we are on our way.

I think there is a very symbolic way to capture this change. If you look at our reports from a few years ago and how we talked about our activities, we would say "the HHC" does this and that. Now, we say "we". I think that there's a long journey from "the HHC" to "we".

Deti, you're not from Budapest. Has that affected your approach to this work?

Deti: There was an election in 2018 in Hungary and that was the third time when the current government won with a 2/3 majority. I felt really alone in this country. I found out that my co-workers, friends, and almost everybody near me voted for this government. We had these discussions about it, but I didn't feel that we speak the same language, or have the same values. I lived in Esztergom, which is like 50 kilometers from Budapest. It's a small city and sometimes I felt stuck here. Only a few months later, I found this job. Now, I think I am in a really good place and I really like my coworkers and I really can discuss things with them. And we all want to help where we can. And now I don't feel—I'm looking for the word—I don't feel powerless anymore.

When I, for example, am writing a post for our blog or Facebook or anything, I always think about people who feel the same loneliness I felt. I really want to give them tools to discuss the topics and I know that sometimes they just feel that they are right but they don't have the right thing to say when somebody is questioning them. I write for people who felt the way I did.

Is there anything that didn't work, that you would have done differently?

Anikó: There was this offline contest to go around the country and find the opposite of an "armchair warrior". By the time we had chosen an agency to work with, it was quite clear that we had to simply change the whole idea. There was nothing wrong with that idea. I think we could have done it, had the pandemic not arrived.

Deti: The other thing is that sometimes I just really don't feel that I can show what we are doing because I just can't

translate everything in English. When you say something in English, which sounds good, you just can't translate it in Hungarian because it sounds awful. And now it is the other way, that we found out something real nice in Hungarian, and if I want to show you, I just don't feel that you will feel the same thing when you hear it in English.

Anikó: What this cooperation has given us is a lot of openness to new things. I'm really grateful for that. Maybe if we had that before, then we could have made braver choices in some cases.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in narratives?

Detti: That they need to keep their mind open, more than usual.

Anikó: Maybe just to think about when communicating our issues, think less of a press conference but more like a discussion with your friends. How would you narrate a story that you have dealt with all day? It's more like a dinner—how would you tell your family what you were doing? To take more of a personal perspective and less of your perspective as a lawyer, litigating the case. There might be a common denominator—there surely is. You really have to be good at finding that and phrasing it or framing it in a way that people would understand what moves you to take that case.

In the future, what do you think you'll remember from this experience?

Anikó: I think I'll remember the cooperation itself and the process of creating something very different. Like how, you know, from nothing all of a sudden there is something. I think that was the most amazing part of this.

Detti: A lot of things. I mean, there are these different work groups. We have this group with [JustLabs]. We have a group in house, in the Helsinki Committee with Aniko and some more colleagues. And we had these agencies. We had the young people who we really met, in real life. And I think that I will think about these people.

VENEZUELA | PROVENE – LA FUNDACIÓN PROBONO DE VENEZUELA

Can you introduce yourself and tell us a word or a phrase that represents your experience with JustLabs?

My name is Gerardo Bello Aurrecoechea. I'm a lawyer, I work at the Fundación Probono de Venezuela, and I live in Caracas, Venezuela. In a word, it would be "waking up" or "reawakening" or "opening your eyes." I think that might describe a little bit what the experience with JustLabs has been like.

Tell us a bit about the work that you do with ProVene.

The vast majority of Venezuelans live in poverty and don't have the time to think about resolving their legal issues, however necessary it may be. Understanding this reality, we said, "what can we do?" If the people we serve can't do it, if they don't have the resources to pay for a lawyer, or the time to look for one, we'll go to where they are on the weekends and give them a free consultancy session to see how we can help them. Our job is such that with a document, with a piece of paper, you can make a person smile. We help to make people smile, pro bono, because in the end, even though it may seem very naive, very innocent to think that a document, that a piece of paper is going to change someone's life, it does.

How would you define narratives?

I still don't think I know what they are. If [the JustLabs team] were listening to me, they would be laughing so hard at this—we've done so much work on this. But, in my experience, if there's anything I've been able to learn or understand about what narratives or changing narratives means, it would be: a way to change beliefs which are instilled in individuals. How we, by changing a belief, can change an individual and how we can, based on that individual's change of belief, make a change in their life and thus change their community. Obviously, changing the country is a huge task and maybe I'm a dreamer but, well, you have to start somewhere.

Tell us a bit about the project you were involved in.

The crisis we are experiencing in Venezuela is no secret to anyone. I believe that, as individuals, it's up to us to lend a hand to our country, to our people, in whatever way we can. The work that's being done, not only by the Fundación Probono de Venezuela, but by all the organizations that promote human rights in this country, is tremendous, and very hard, very difficult. We're in the eye of the hurricane. I have no words to describe or explain my gratitude, as a Venezuelan, for the work that these organizations are doing. A few years ago—when we were trying to see how we could help—this beautiful project called La Nave (The Ship) was born. It seeks to give a new meaning to the work we've been doing and to do it in a creative way—because, after all, we lawyers are very boring and it's hard to get us out of the comfort zone of our books.

When we were first invited to Colombia to develop this project, it was very difficult to come up with an idea. I remember very fondly a conversation outside, on a break with a Colombian friend, while he was smoking a cigarette. There was a food truck there, and the friend asked me: Are there food trucks in Venezuela?" I told him that we're starting to see them—and in that moment I told him, "For many years, I've wanted to set up a mobile office for the foundation, like a 'food

truck', to drive to different communities and open our office out of the truck and reach all the places our foundation otherwise wouldn't be present in." He thought for a moment with his cigarette and said to me, "That's it, that's what we have to do! We're going to make a food truck for the foundation; we're going to make the 'ProVene-Mobile'. And from there the idea grew and no one could stop it and that's how 'La Nave de ProVene' (ProVene's Ship) was born.

La Nave de ProVene seeks to make you blast off from reality, to make you blast off from those beliefs, and blast off as an individual—because in the end, we associate blasting off with overcoming ourselves. That's what we're looking for with this ProVene project; it's a vehicle, a tool that reaches the communities, lands, opens its doors, its crew goes out into the community, the crew members and captain go to talk to the people, to learn about their situation. We see how we can help you, what activities we can do; and through these activities, to leave that reality behind—to "blast off"—and arrive at a better one. [How?] Through human rights, through activities that strengthen individuals' knowledge of human rights, Venezuelans' knowledge of human rights. We imagine the activities functioning like pill capsules. The projects are like capsules that are filled with medicine—in this case, the capsules are filled with human rights. The capsule is an activity: paint a wall, develop a face shield. You ask all these people: What is the human right behind the activity? Why is it important to fight for it, and defend it—because it is yours and it is inherent to you?

That's La Nave. It's a vehicle that reaches the neediest communities in Venezuela—focusing on Caracas for now—and that will hopefully later expand to Colombia. It's such a cool and beautiful project that it can be replicated in almost any country in the world. I hope to have many ships landing in many communities.

What was your experience like in this process?

Long and intense. Super intense, but super enriching. In these twelve years of working at the foundation, the most challenging and enriching project I've ever worked on in my life has been JustLabs' narrative change project. It's been amazing, in every sense of the word. I've met wonderful people, I've met people who have changed the way I think, I've met people who have opened my mind as a lawyer, making me think outside the box.

It not only changed me as a person, it also changed ProVene. This project has changed us because we also understand—and well, with the pandemic as well, because everything has blended together—so we have come to understand that the work we were doing and how we were doing it was not enough. That we had to open our minds to go further, to understand that lawyers can do more creative work, that lawyers can invent, that we are not stuck in an office with a book, but that we can develop weird and wonderful activities, and reach the communities in a more powerful way. So, it has been a rollercoaster of emotions and experiences, this project with JustLabs—but at the end of the day, it's all been positive. There is still a long way to go, but we're getting there and there is a lot of desire to keep going.

What were some of the challenges you encountered in this process?

I mean, obviously in the context of this country, everything is a challenge. Going from your house to your office is already a challenge. One of the biggest challenges we've encountered during this project is the economic and social context of the country, which has changed a lot since we started the project. We went from being the cheapest country in the world to being the most expensive country in the world, with the highest inflation in the world. We went from being a country where petrol was practically free, to being the country with the most expensive petrol in the world. Today there's no petrol, there's a huge petrol shortage, and queues and lines of cars to get petrol.

We've faced significant mechanical challenges in terms of developing La Nave: from finding the truck and remodeling it, to adjusting it mechanically so that it's up to date. And it frequently breaks down. All of this has been a major challenge.

And I think another challenge, or something that's been very complicated, involves the team of the ship—the crew. As I've said, the situation in the country makes it very difficult to get people who'll stay with you. The situation means that people are leaving the country and emigrating and looking for a better life in other countries. You get a team together—we've been creating the La Nave's team with lawyers and a creative person with an interest or experience in social change, along with another team over here, with allies from the communities—and suddenly one of the lawyers leaves! You have to look for someone else, for suitable people. Talented, dedicated people are hard [to get], and once you get them, it's even harder to keep them.

What were some of the things you've learned or are taking with you from this experience?

I think, first of all, to have a lot of patience. If this process, this project, has taught me anything, it's to be patient, with a better understanding of people. I feel that all my life I've been a creative person but, if anything, this process or this project has made me more creative, better at thinking outside the box. It's something that now extends beyond my work as a lawyer, my work in the other projects I'm involved in apart from the foundation.

If there's one thing I'm taking away from this process, it's the people that I've met. I've met people I never imagined I'd meet in my life, people from all over the world. In this project I've met people from Cambodia, Turkey, Russia, Australia, Hungary, Mexico, Colombia, the United States. [The director of JustLabs] is, as we say in Venezuela, un tipazo (a great guy), who has devoted himself to helping us. We can't thank him enough for his dedication. There are a lot of people behind JustLabs, and if there's one thing I'd like to keep with me, it's those people and everything we've experienced and learned from them.

Was there anything that didn't work in the process?

I think the most difficult, the most complex part of this project was understanding what a narrative is. I don't think I can say it enough. It's been the most complex, the most difficult thing, understanding what a narrative is. Then, once you understand it as a concept, understanding what a narrative is in practice, understanding what a narrative is in the reality of Venezuela, of a Venezuelan, and how to change that narrative, that belief. I mean, at the end of the day that's the essence of the project, so, in itself, the project is complicated, it's complicated. Nobody said it was going to be easy, and that's the way it's proved.

What would you like to be able to say to a "narratives expert" about what they need to change in how they present the concept of narratives for people to understand it more easily?

Speaking once again as the cuadrado, as someone who thinks in a literal, direct way: one of the issues is that there's no concept of narrative as such. You can't go to the Real Academia Española dictionary, search for "narrative," and understand what a narrative is. The meaning that's written down isn't the meaning that you apply to what we're doing right now. So, I think that's the biggest problem for me: theoretically, in Spanish, there's no specific meaning like, "narrative is this." According to the dictionary, narrative is not what we're doing.

At some point in the early workshops, you said something along the lines of: "We're an organization that offers legal assistance. Stop talking to me about a food truck, because food is not what we're giving." But as you continued developing the project, your ideas included and expanded well beyond collaborating with community kitchens. What changed?

As a lawyer, we sometimes mistakenly think that we have to stay in our comfort zone. That's a mistake. You have to evolve with the situation, to keep up with what's happening and move forward. I think the trigger was the pandemic. We're an

organization that works on the street day in and day out. We were going to have our pro bono houses in many low-income communities in Caracas. We were catering to hundreds of people every month and thousands a year; suddenly they pulled down the **Santamaría**¹, they shuttered up the streets, and we were left with nothing to do. What then? We couldn't go to the neighborhoods to work. The organization was surely doomed, unless we cracked ourselves open, opened up our minds, and evolved along with what was happening. I think we pivoted, well, pretty much because of this project. It's been hard but we kept the ball rolling.

It was like accepting that in order to achieve our goals—in order to do the work or to be an NGO or to be an organization that could survive and continue to grow—we had to stop thinking like lawyers. We had to open the door. We had to complement our work in new ways with things like music, like sports, like community kitchens, like theater, like psychologists, like upcycling—like everything, right? In the end, it is about understanding that, as lawyers, we can't just limit ourselves—we have to open up to a range of options.

In order to survive, grow and evolve, you have to know how to adapt, and knowing how to adapt implies keeping your mind open to change. This goes beyond what ProVene is, what I am as a person and what the project of *La Nave* is: understanding that in order to evolve we have to adapt to situations and keep an open mind.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in narratives?

I think that for anyone who wants to implement narrative change projects, the first thing I'd recommend is that they sit down for a moment, forget about all the experiences they've had, do away with all the mechanisms of social construction, their way of thinking, and sit down with a blank slate. If you say you want to work on narrative change, then forget everything you've learned before and start from scratch. You have to be open to everything. Don't set limits or barriers, don't bring old ways of thinking or ideas you applied in your professional and life processes to this new stage. In order to be more fluid in terms of changing narratives, I think you need to have a mind which is free from preconceptions.

In the future, what do you think you'll remember from this experience?

I think there's already something that I'm going to hold on to, a seed that I try to water every day: creativity. All my life I've been somewhat creative, but through this process it's become something I've fallen in love with. Creativity, working on it and using it—it's been a lot of fun.

I think another thing that I've gotten better at and will continue to get better at is patience. Patience is one of the most valuable things that I've learned from this process and is something that I want to have more and more of in my life. To get better and better at being patient.

¹ In Venezuela, the name "Santamaría" is given to the roll-up metal shutters used as doors in shops, warehouses and commercial establishments. 'Bajar la Santamaría' is a colloquial way of referring to the denial of a service or the termination of a relationship.

AUSTRALIA | HRLC – HUMAN RIGHTS LAW CENTRE

Can you introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about your experience with JustLabs?

Daney: I'm Daney Faddoul. I work at the Human Rights Law Centre. I come from Sydney, Australia, and my collaboration with JustLabs has been invigorating.

Michelle: My name is Michelle Bennett. I work in Australia at the Human Rights Law Centre. My work is all about communicating human rights and working towards a fairer and more just country. I found working with JustLabs, and the work that we did as a team, really inspiring.

Tom: My name is Tom Clark. I'm in Australia and I'm a human rights campaigner. Solidarity is a guiding principle in my work and a word that comes to mind when I think of JustLabs is "experimentation".

How would you define narratives?

Michelle: Narratives are stories. They're people's stories. I think I've spent the last 10 years reading kids' books to my kids and some of them are so boring and tedious, but they always have a narrative. They have a beginning, middle, and end. I think narrative, to me, is just being able to tell a story—and listen to a story, too.

Tom: The two examples that I've read about and that are stuck in my head are, one, that idea of the kind of undercurrent in the ocean. The waves that float in and get knocked around are the kinds of things that are happening day to day. But beneath the surface, down low in the water, is that sort of bigger pull or tug of the current that takes you in a particular direction. So, I guess being mindful of narrative is being mindful of what current you're in, and whether you can change it.

The other example is mosaics. Each tile represents a story that we tell. Today there might be a need for this organization to respond to a particular thing that's happened in politics, and we might choose to lay down a particular color. But if I'm just laying down the same color tile, then over time my mosaic is going to be dominated by that one color. I think the practice of narratives is taking that step back and thinking, ok, what's that bigger picture that I'm trying to create?"

Tell us a bit about the project you were involved in.

Tom: We were exploring ideas of how to raise the profile of and support for an Australian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms—a centralized kind of charter that would list and articulate and hopefully protect the rights, responsibilities, and freedoms that every person in Australia has.

Daney: That concept work led to two things for the Human Rights Law Centre. One that was called the Time Machine project and the other was called the Co-Design project.

Michelle: The Time Machine project was the idea of putting yourself in history—which side of history would you have been on? It's this really beautiful, big idea. We were talking about collaborating with a museum. You would literally put yourself into the suffragettes' protests on the women's right to vote—which side of history would you have been on? Now, in this

very changed world, things like that where you're physically putting yourself into something and being part of something feels very far away.

Daney: The Co-Design project, on the other hand, was something that could be done online. One of the things that our research showed is that most Australians believe human rights are important, but they also think that human rights are actually fine in Australia. It happens somewhere else; it doesn't happen here. We need to show people that there are human rights issues that need to be addressed and improved in Australia.

The concept of the Co-Design project was giving people the ability to engage and, in effect, design their own sort of human rights. If you just phrase it as "which human rights would you like to see entrenched in our laws?", you kind of already need to be sold on these issues, so to speak. We want it to be straightforward and easy for people to access without any prior understanding, reading, or experience dealing with the issues. That's why we turned it into a quiz: "Can you guess where these human rights abuses happen?"

Michelle: It was a quiz on human rights in the Australian context, putting that up against what was happening around the rest of the world. Things like, if you are gay or lesbian working in a religious school, you can be fired, or children can be asked to leave. Things like, from as young as age 10 you can be put in prison in Australia. Even though I work in this space, the questions that came out of it were a bit embarrassing at how far behind some of the rest of the world we are when it comes to human rights issues.

What was the experience of this project like for you?

Tom: I thoroughly enjoyed the process. It took a long time to understand what the process was or what I was in the middle of—to find that right comfort level of like, ok, this is an experimental space. We can think out loud, come up with ideas, explore. We've got permission to fail, but we are going to learn in that process. And I think that is a fantastic thing to try to achieve. A lot of not-for-profit organizations know we are going to these spaces thinking we have to impress potential funders and we have to do this and that. I think kind of letting go or dropping your guard and saying, ok, there is no pressure here, we really can experiment in the lab, if you like—that was really a great exercise.

Michelle: I think what's exciting about JustLabs and the work that they do is the thoughtfulness of it. You often don't get a chance to stop and think about this work. Sometimes you're reacting to the news, you're trying to get on top of the news, you're trying to frame things the way that you want. You're putting out fires. Whereas the work of JustLabs is that beautiful opportunity to be able to stop and think about the way that you talk about your work and the way that you communicate your work and the way that you try and change minds with the words that you use and the concepts that you use.

I'd say it changed the way we work. Like, we don't write up a press release, or do a tweet, or write a quote for a news article without thinking about messaging—without thinking about what is the best use of words to relay what we want to say here? It's a daily thing. It's now ingrained into the way that we work.

Can you tell us a bit more about how the HRLC's way of communicating has changed?

Tom: It's no longer as technical. Very often, you'll hear the lawyers give a quote and it's rarely about the law. I think that's the big cultural shift in their messaging. It's about the values at stake or the principles at stake and people's lives, rather than the laws themselves.

Michelle: Yeah. And that's been really inspiring and really well received within the organization. When we talk about a legal

strategy, at the very start of that legal strategy, we talk about how we are going to communicate that work. We do something called a “new matter sheet” which talks about the core process, like how this case is going to be run. But importantly, we have on those documents a space for messaging—how we are going to talk about this work.

So, when it comes to raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, we don’t start with that. We start with a child. This is what a 10-year-old looks like, this is how young, this is how small. A child at the age of 10 still has baby teeth and they’re not allowed to watch movies that are above PG. They can’t have Facebook accounts. But they can be put in prison.

Tom: One of the tactics that they used, which I think was fantastic, was getting supporters to share a photo of themselves when they were 10 years old and to say something on social media about what they were doing when they were 10. So, you had all these people saying, when I was 10, I loved going to the beach or collecting shells or playing with my Lego figures—just all these lovely, warm things that you’re like, yeah, that’s what a 10-year-old should be doing—not being in a concrete prison cell.

That was a really powerful campaign initiative because it shifted that focus away from some faceless numbers and statistics and brought it back to this kind of emotive level of, like, oh that’s really wrong.

Returning to the Time Machine and Co-Design projects, what were some of the challenges you encountered in this process?

Tom: The most difficult period of the project was sort of about 80% along the [concept-development] journey, where we felt like we had some really clear objectives, we knew what we wanted to do, we had some basic concepts or creative concepts that we were toying with, but we couldn’t quite land the one concept where we just thought, “this is great, let’s go for it.” There was probably like a six-week period where I felt I just kept revisiting the idea and going over the same ground and discussing possibilities. It felt like, “oh we’re running out of time, we’ve got to do something.” We eventually went, “ok, let’s bite the bullet.”

Daney: Because I wasn’t involved in this process from the very beginning, it meant that there were things about this process that I had to pick up quickly and learn. It’s like walking in someone else’s shoes. It’s an incredibly valuable experience but it’s someone else’s shoes—you don’t know where those shoes have gone.

And the Facebook ad manager process. If I hadn’t lost hair up until this point, I certainly would have lost some through it. That was the big frustration with this process and it was one that was beyond anyone’s control.

What have you learned, or what are you taking with you from this process?

Daney: I’d like to say a better understanding of Facebook ad manager but... I think that the importance of collaboration is the biggest thing that I’ll take away from all of this. Whether from Mexico or Hungary, there are very valuable things that I’ve learned from my peers around the world.

Tom: A key learning that I took away from this process was the importance of carving out a space away from your day-to-day work so that you can reflect on some of the bigger trends, some of the big picture directions, and just take that time to really assess your own work. Time for reflection, but also that sort of research and development area—looking to the horizon about what’s next, what are the trends out there that we should be getting ahead of. There is a sort of mindset in the not-for-profit world that we couldn’t possibly spend money that wasn’t going directly to our clients or to the cause, but actually, the cause gets stronger in the long run if you do allow that space and that time and some energy to go into reflecting on practice.

The other thing I really enjoyed and learnt from was just that multi-disciplinary kind of approach. The room of people that JustLabs collected at the [lab] was just a fantastic collection of human rights campaigners, but also neuroscientists and creative agencies and just, a really fantastic and diverse mix of skills in the room.

Michelle: I think it's the realization that it is really important to stop and think about what you're saying and stop and think about how you're communicating something. Part of my job at the Human Rights Law Centre is to get lawyers to not sound like lawyers. I love this kind of messaging work because it recognizes that persuasion is not going to happen if you're talking at someone or talking down to someone.

Is there anything that didn't work about the process?

Tom: I felt it took a while for us to ease into the appropriate mood or vibe of the project. It was very challenging, I think, to do some of that big thinking in a short time and space. You'd sort of have these ideas and go, I really want to sit with that for a while or dwell on it, but because of the nature of the activity it was sort of like, "OK, we're moving on to the next part of the conversation. I felt a lot of pressure to lock in a particular idea there and then, and then once you commit to an idea, you feel a little bit wedded to it. But I have to say, the JustLabs crew were very good at saying, ok, we can revisit things. The idea was to just get the conversation going.

Michelle: I don't know that it was hard, but you know, the time zone difference is trickier at times for people in Australia. I've got two kids and having to do a full-time job during the day and all of that kind of stuff. So, that was a little bit challenging, not being able to take advantage of some of the really amazing things that JustLabs setup.

One of the challenges of this process for everyone was starting with a big creative concept. Did having that big idea—even if it was unrealizable—help encourage you to be creative? Or did anything else in the process help support your own creativity?

Daney: Oh, always. If nothing else, the space to think and to be creative—that alone is incredibly important to do. But the benefit of all of this was that it wasn't just done as, "For the next two hours, please think creatively and here's all the things you need to do that and afterwards thanks for your time, have a good day!" It's important that there was purpose to it and there were abilities to implement. The Co-Design, I think, is a good example of where something that was started in a very creative process has now been turned into something that is actionable.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in narratives?

Daney: Before going further, think about: What is your story? Why are you involved in all of this? Why do you want to progress and engage in human rights and advocacy for human rights? If your values are not clear, then things won't be as easy or simple or effective.

Michelle: The only way we're going to win and get the human rights change that we want is to bring people along on a journey and you do that by telling a story. I talk a lot about my work with my kids, and hopefully that inspires them. I think they're getting a bit sick of me trying to explain defunding the police and abolition—it's really hard to explain to an 11-year-old that there are alternatives to prison. But that's actually not a bad place to start.

In the future, what do you think you'll remember from this experience?

Tom: I think the main thing I'll remember from the process—the advice that I'll continue to give to organizations or

campaigns—will be very much to carve out space and time and ideally some resources to really reflect on your work and to experiment. Some of them aren't going to work, some of them might even backfire, but if you don't experiment, you'll never find that next winning formula.

Daney: It has been an incredible opportunity which allowed me to learn from the best practitioners around the planet and learn the experiences and struggles from people around the world doing similar campaigns for human rights. I think that for me is the thing that is most indelibly stuck in my mind from all of this in terms of learning values and narrative and what others have experienced and the things that we have shared together through that.

Michelle: I like to think that you pick up from these kinds of projects and these kinds of work—where you are working with creative, thoughtful people—that you take a piece of it wherever you go. I always love connecting with other people who share the same values and have a vision for that. I do that in Australia and it's amazing being able to do that across the world. And I've loved watching Daney be inspired by that too, and Tommy being really excited at the start of the project and just kind of a giddy joy at doing this workshop, to talk about human rights, and you know, it's exactly the kind of stuff that you want to do. It's such an amazing experience and opportunity. So yeah, it's the joyfulness of connecting with people who are on the same track as you—who are on the same path, I think.

Like the feeling of community?

Michelle: Yeah, community.