

International Childhood Trauma Conference

Does this feel dignifying? The power of storytelling: haunting, healing and the ethics of voice

August 2025





“When I think of the Acknowledgement of Country, I think of the land and the relationship of First Nations people, its plants, its waterways. **Everything this land was before First Contact.**

There are the waterways through the piece that feeds the plant life. I’ve placed us within the plants, to show our connection to them. **We aren’t separate from country, but exist with it, as a bond that can’t be broken.”**

[Charlotte Allingham](#) – Wiradjuri, Ngiyampaa woman from Central West New South Wales (living in Naarm)

if I write a poem *by Jazz Money*

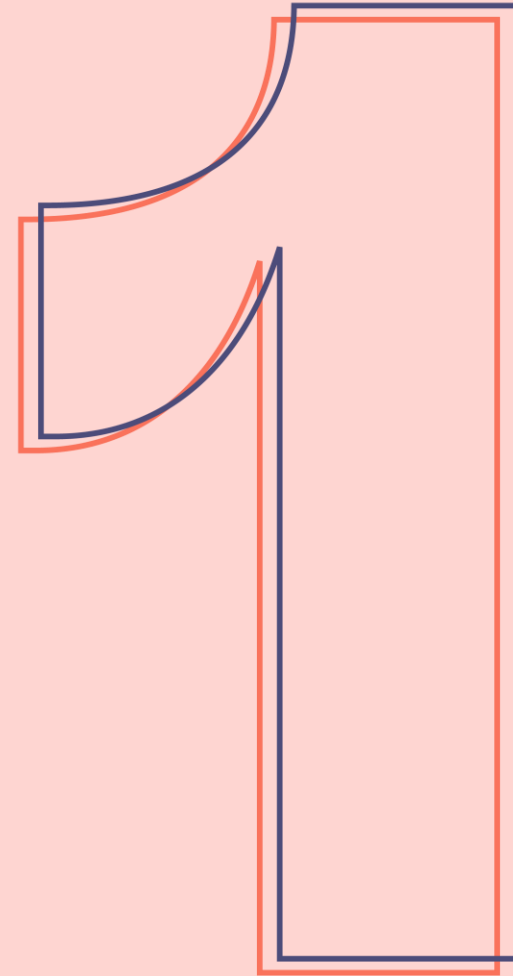
This poem was first published by
University of Queensland Press in
Jazz Money's debut poetry collection,
how to make a basket, 2021

and if I write a poem
it's so that our children
will read some truth
of their family

and if I write
it's because our story
hasn't been written
by us
for us

I write a poem
because I love this Country
I write a word
because I love my daughter
who isn't yet born

Hello,
I'm Morgan









Lived
experience
& knowledge
equity

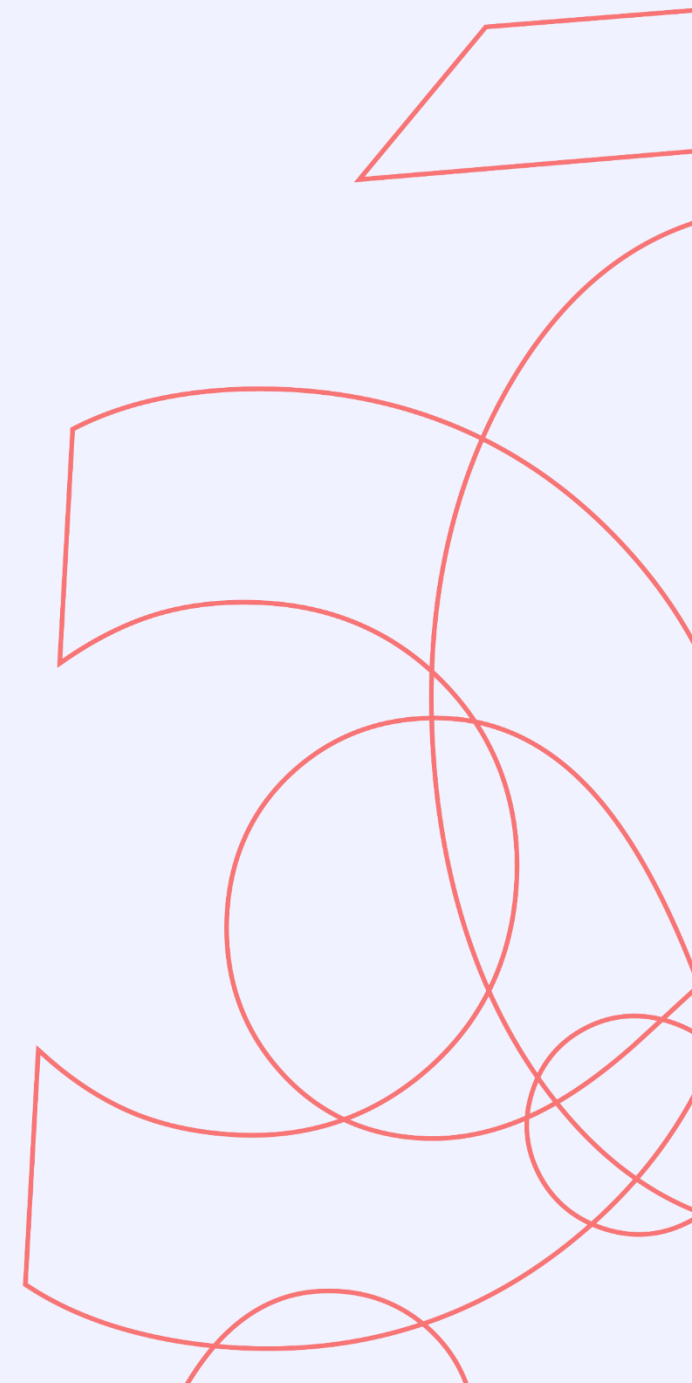
Power
literacy

Systems
thinking

Before we move on...

- We contain multitudes
- Identity is fluid
- We are all storytellers
- The system is a force

An invitation



The problem





The Guardian (April 27, 2025)

[Virginia Giuffre hailed as 'fierce warrior' for women, who 'gave voice to the silenced'](#)



The Guardian (April 27, 2025)

Virginia Giuffre hailed as 'fierce warrior' for women, who 'gave voice to the silenced'

“Virginia Giuffre survived sex trafficking, fought for justice for over a decade, and gave voice to the silenced ... She has now taken her own life. **The fight cost her everything.** Never forget what this system does to women.”

– Charlotte Proudman



The Sydney Morning Herald (September 24, 2022)
['Rage saved my life in the end': Grace Tame on not backing down'](#)



The Sydney Morning Herald (September 24, 2022)
[‘Rage saved my life in the end’: Grace Tame on not backing down’](#)

“With every new story that’s written about me by a different person, **there’s a shift of the kaleidoscope**. And things get further and further away from the truth.”

– Grace Tame



VICE (August 10, 2017)
[Dylan Voller Is The Prison Reform Activist Australia Needs](#)



VICE (August 10, 2017)
[Dylan Voller Is The Prison Reform Activist Australia Needs](#)

“I’d rather have a picture of my face instead of me in a restraint chair.
It’s a really bad memory.
I kind of want to forget ...
 [Here Dylan pauses, he’s visibly emotional. We have to stop the interview for a few minutes] ...
 But I get it. It’s a proclamation, which sticks in everyone’s head.
 It gets used a *lot*. –”

– Dylan Voller



What does it mean to
be a narrator?

Who holds that role?

A cacophony of projections.

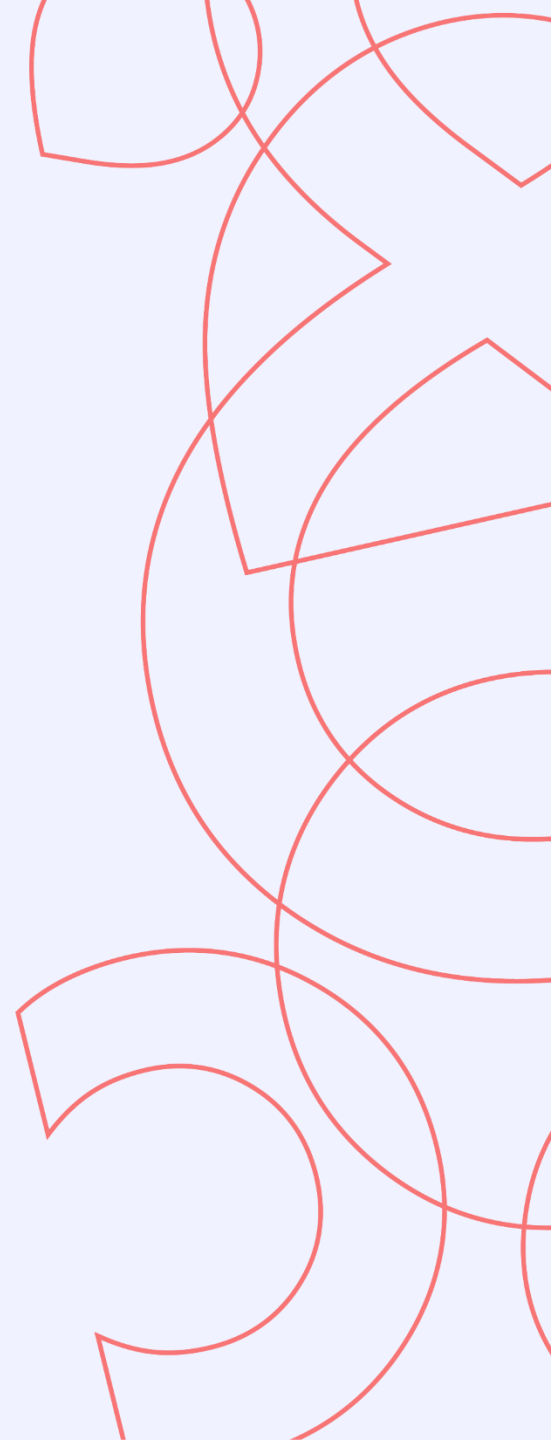
So, what happens when the frame is already fixed before the story is even told?

Let's dive
deeper





Another invitation



Let's make it tangible

What are some of the reasons you need stories in your work?

“The end justifies the means.
But what if there is never an end?
All we have is means.”

– Ursula K. Le Guin

The two-voices table

SECTOR PROFESSIONAL (Narrator)
“I’ve found an emotionally moving story”
“Here's a typical client we can showcase”
“This example will help us get more funding”
“What will we call her?”
“Let’s make her dialogue sound natural”
“She is an inspiration”

Now, from Little Morgan's lens

PERSON (Subject)
"I feel like a specimen"
"I'm being reduced to a user"
"I'm a cost and burden to society"
"I feel like nobody can see me"
"Why can no-one hear what I'm trying to say?"
"What's wrong with me and who I am?"

This is how tropes are made.

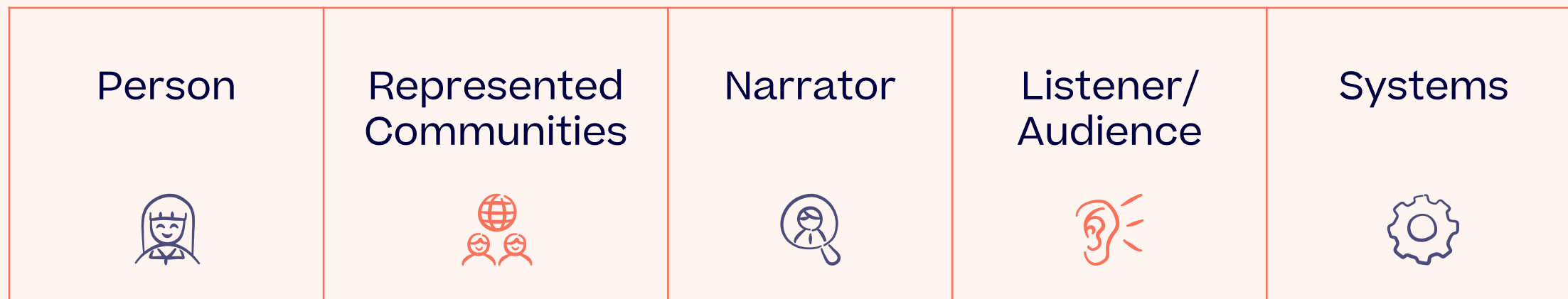
“In order to retain our visions, to protect our imaginations, and keep our surface tension, **we have to hold tightly to that space of refusal.**”

– Ruby Oluoch

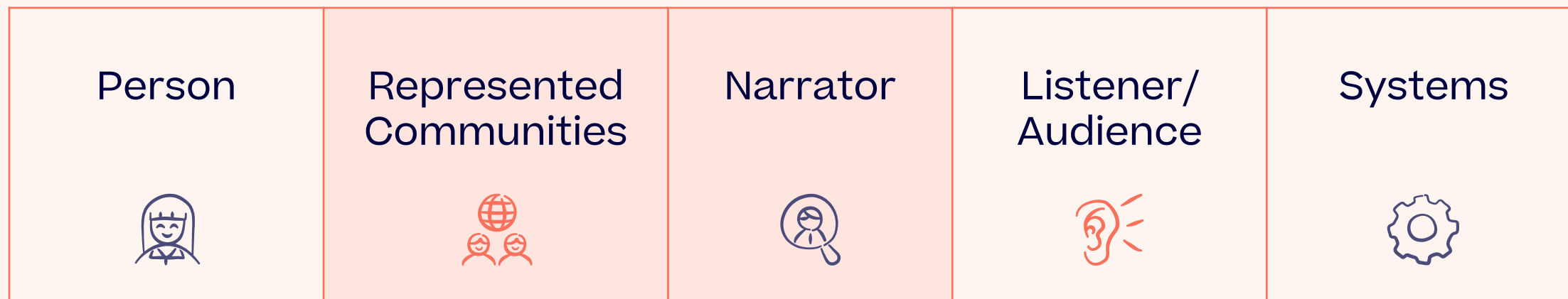
**What else
is possible?**



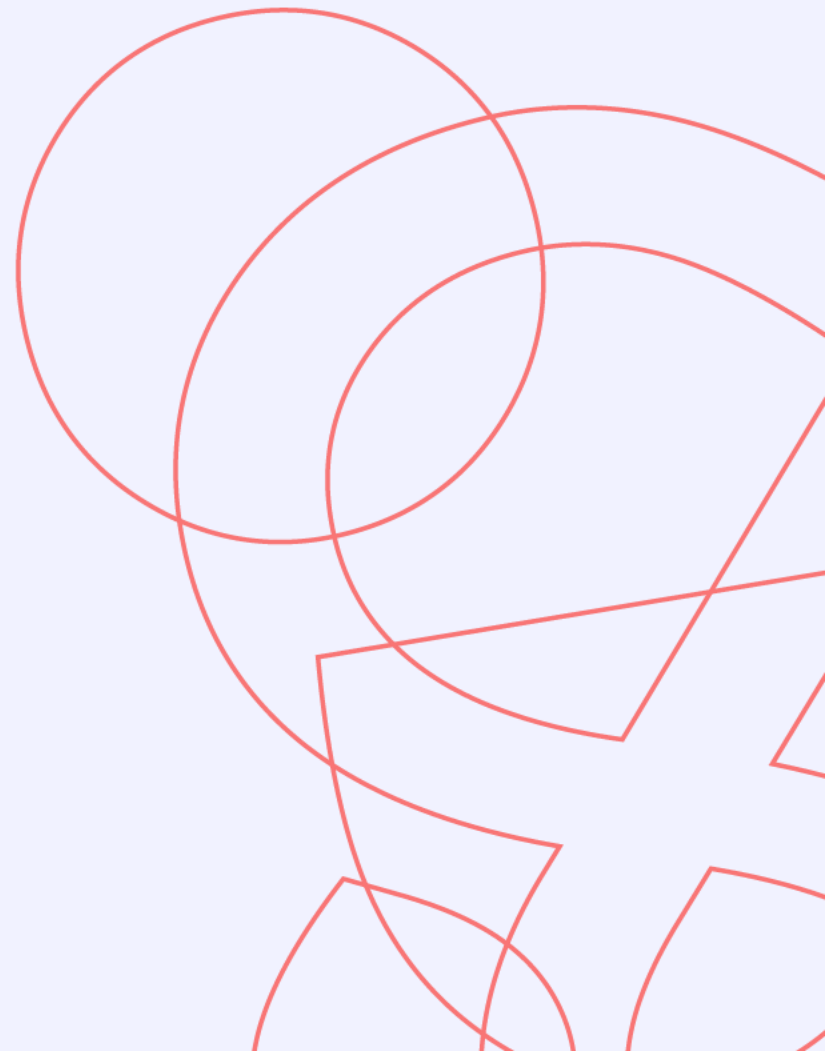
The cost-opportunity framework



The cost-opportunity framework



**So, what might
it look like to
hold that line?**



Common traps

Asking for
unnecessary or
graphic detail

Framing that
erases strength or
complexity

Reducing
someone to a
single identity
label

Over-emphasising
'beating the odds

Idolising or
exceptionalising

Framing the
organisation
as saviour

Using story to
validate pre-set
conclusions

Tidying or
simplifying the
story arc

Using
stories without
organisational
follow-through

Interrupting harm

Ask for
what's meaningful
and purposeful

Include
contradictions
and capabilities

Use more
nuanced,
respectful
language

Balance personal
strength with
systemic analysis

Resist the binary
of hero versus
burden

Centre mutuality,
not charity

Invite reflection
instead of proof

Honour the
unfinished nature
of the story

Pair storytelling
with system level
action

**We shape stories
– and stories
shape us.**





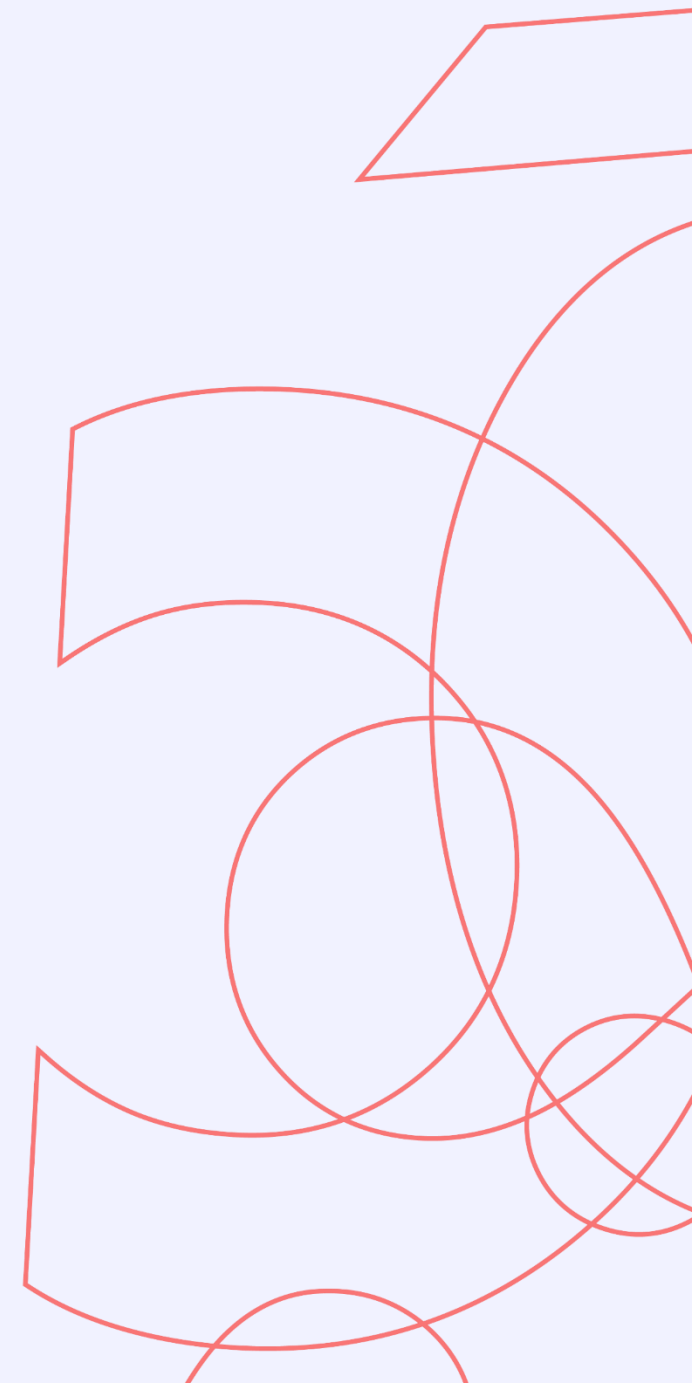
“My story was often told on my behalf, and in ways that did harm – distorting how I saw myself, reinforcing damaging narratives, and delaying my healing. **At its worst, it kept me stuck in identities I was trying to grow out of.**”

– Morgan Cataldo, “Designed with Care” book chapter

“I also experienced times when telling my story was deeply transformative and healing – when the process honoured truths I was still unearthing about myself. **Sometimes, truths told about me reshaped how I saw myself.** They included strengths I hadn’t yet recognised.”

– Morgan Cataldo, *“Designed with Care” book chapter*

A final invitation



Make room for multitudes and multiple truths.

Stop saying the system is “out there.”

The system is also us.

And the system is **ours** to remake.

Thank you

