

Your Guide to Empathy Mapping



What is an Empathy Map?

An Empathy Map can help you deepen your understanding of the lived experience of people in your service or community by putting yourself in their shoes. It can help you begin to understand what matters to the people in your community; how they feel, and why they might act in certain ways. It's a helpful way to test whether your current thinking aligns with the real perspectives of those on the ground, and it can lay the foundations for working together with communities to design and co-produce meaningful solutions. Empathy Maps are especially useful when exploring complex or sensitive issues, such as poverty, because they allow participants to speak in the third person about the individual at the centre of the map. This creates a degree of distance, making it easier for people to share experiences that may in fact be deeply personal.

How to use an Empathy Map

Using the template below, invite participants to imagine that the smiley face is a person in their community. Give the person a name and a persona to make the exercise more relatable, for instance: Jack is 14 years old and lives in a rural area. You can tailor the persona to reflect the kinds of people you or your organisation work with. Ask them to fill in the Empathy Map as if they were "Jack", imagining what it's like for him to access, for example, well-being support in his local area. Participants can choose to draw on their own experiences or think about what "Jack" might go through, based on their knowledge of the community. This provides a safe and creative way to surface insights, whether personal or observed.

The next step is to build on these insights by working directly with people in the community, or those who use the service, to co-create solutions. A useful place to start is by exploring questions such as:



What does Jack SEE?

What does the support that he currently accesses look like? Is it old or new? Closed on weekends? Easy to find? Inviting? Off-putting?



What does Jack HEAR?

Who speaks to him? Is the location noisy, busy, quiet, or calm?



What does Jack THINK & FEEL?

What emotions is he feeling? Is he worried? Is he optimistic?



What does Jack SAY & DO?

What does he say out loud? What actions/behaviours does he take? What are all the things that Jack must do to access the support? Did he have to get a bus? Walk? Call someone? Who does he need to speak to?



(Activity inspired from 'The Design Thinking Toolbox', 2020)

Persona Example – “Rhian”

Age – 42

Lives – In a rural village outside Fishguard

Family – Single mum, 2 children in school

Situation – Part-time carer, struggles with transport and heating cost

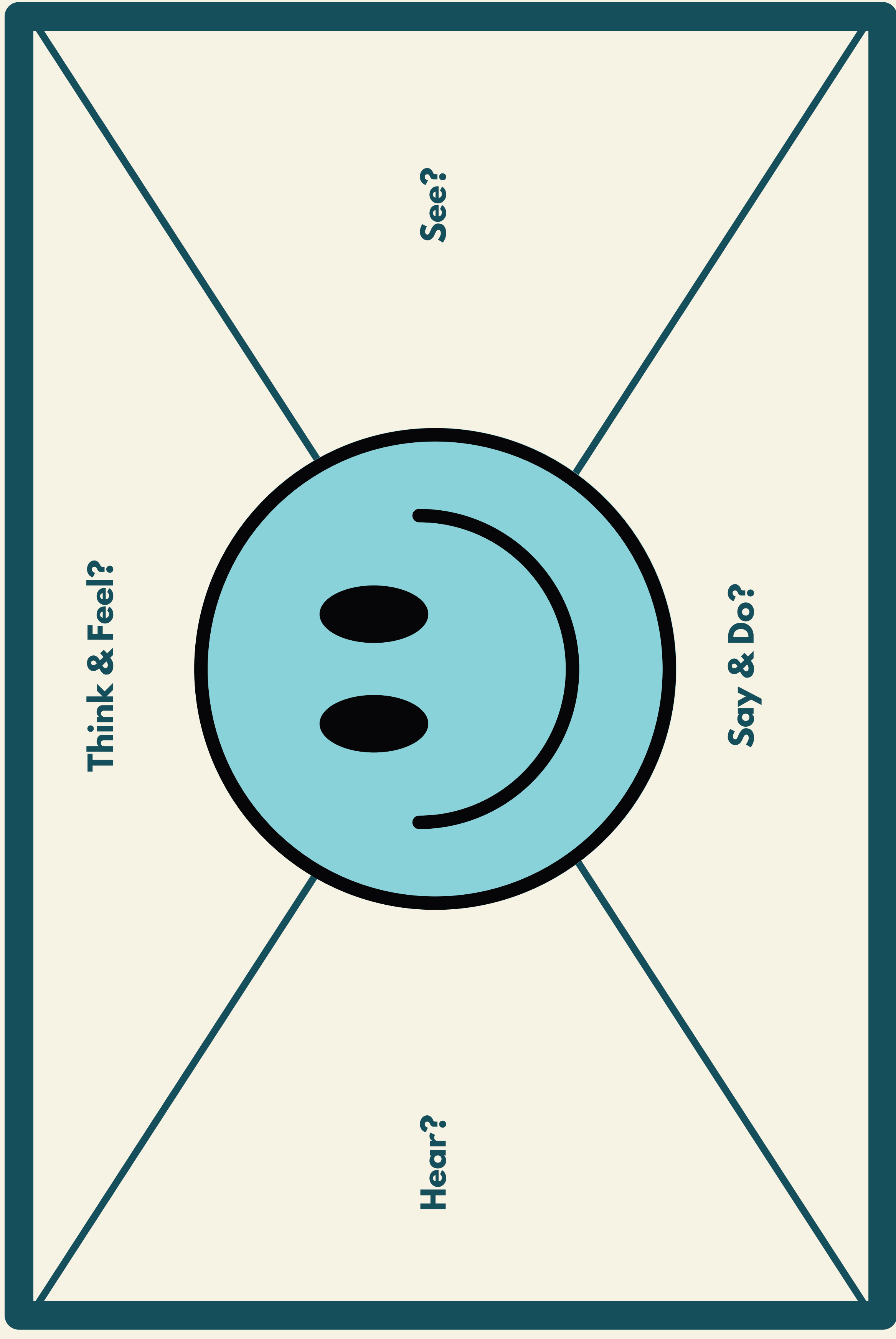
Income – On Universal Credit, seasonal work when available

Access to Services – Limited, Nearest Job Centre is 2 bus rides away

This persona helps highlight key issues like: Rural isolation, Transport exclusion, Hidden poverty & Energy poverty



Empathy Map Template Example



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