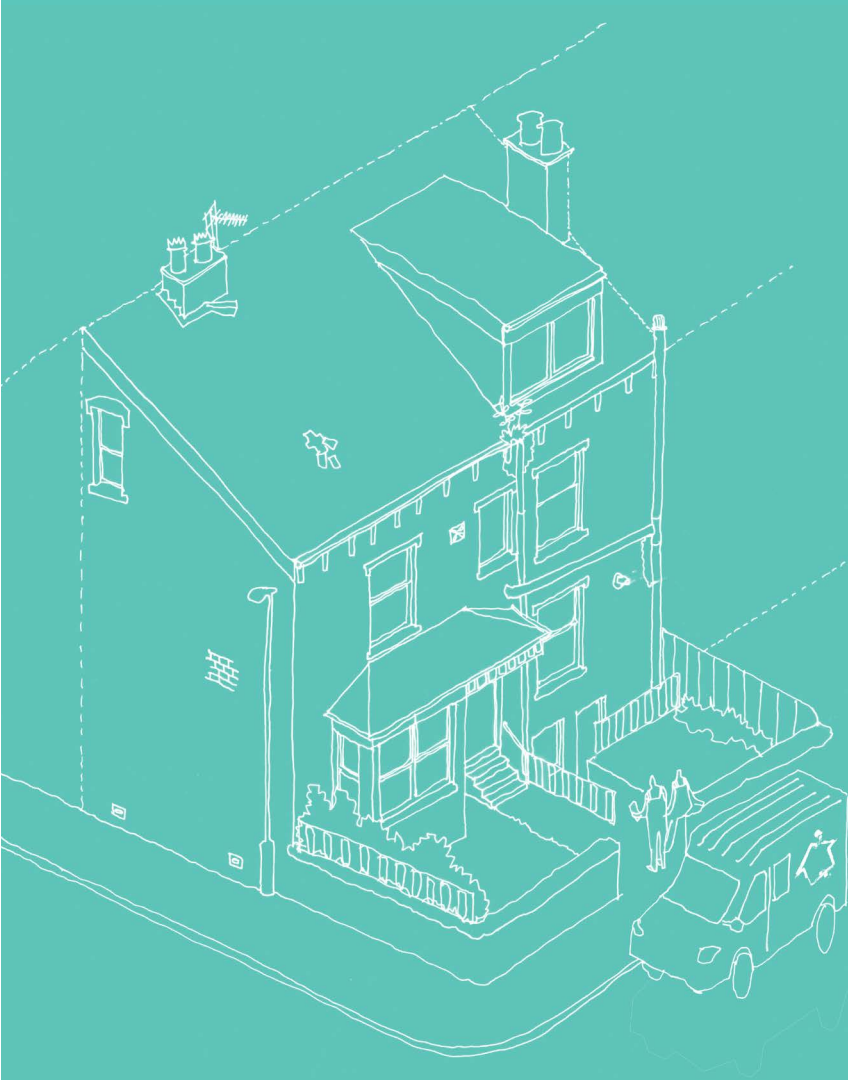


# The Canopy Guide to Retrofit



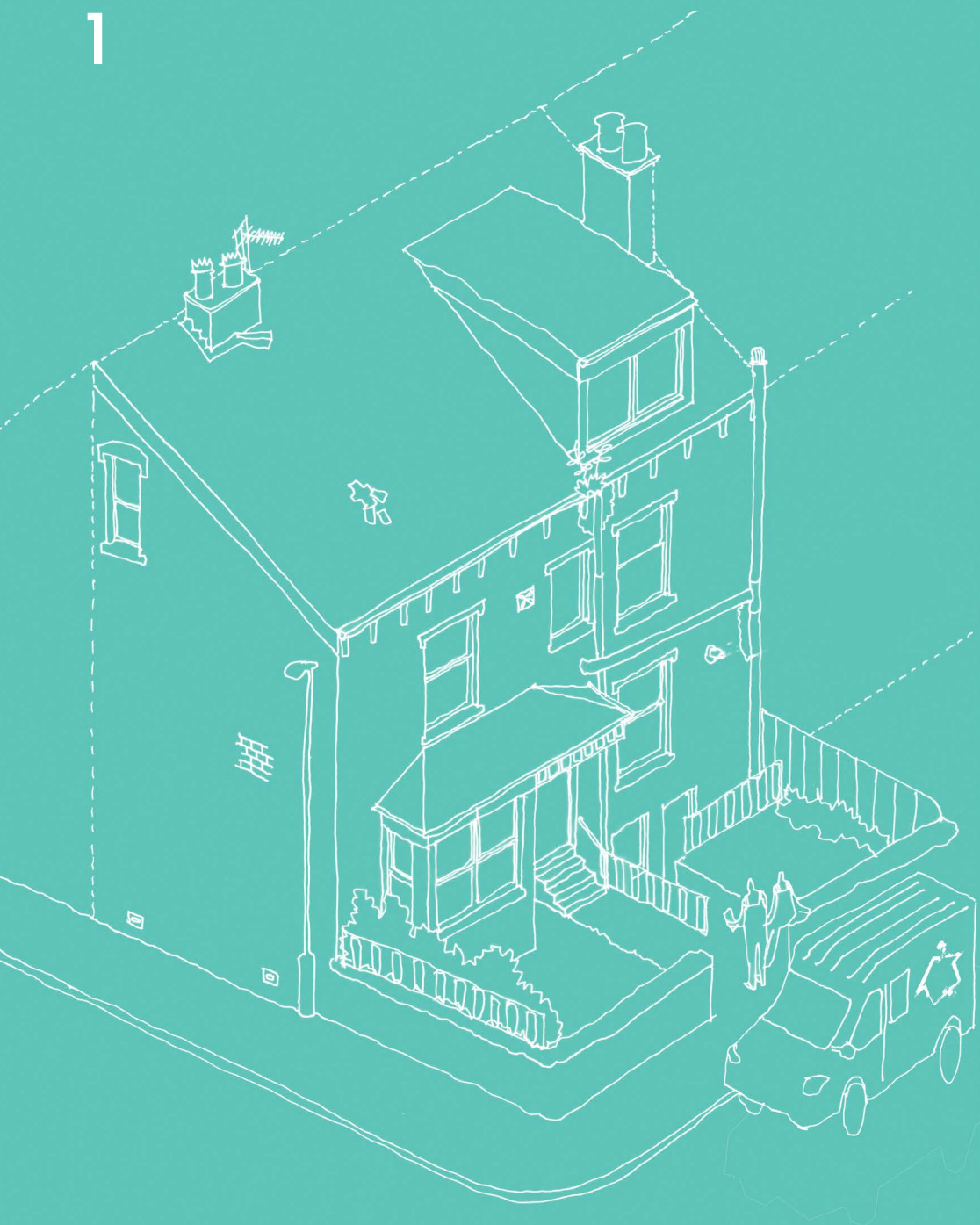
Site Workers & Volunteers



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# Community-led retrofit





Left to right; Michelle, Fowsat, Adam,  
Mamode, Aisling, Steve, Kev and Valentin.

Community-led retrofit projects are those that are carried out by and/or alongside the members of the community they set out to serve. They typically include a varied group of individuals with differing skill sets who combine their skills to deliver people centred housing retrofit.

Government initiatives have so far failed to deliver on retrofit at the speed required to meet 2050 emission reductions targets

There have been issues with the retrofits that have been delivered, including poor quality workmanship, a lack of trust, and poor attention to detail which can negatively affect building integrity and indoor air quality.

There has been a rapid increase in retrofit projects delivered by community groups, to reduce the bills of the people they support, and to reduce emissions from buildings to slow climate change.

Community-led retrofit, and the 'self-help' model that Canopy operates within, enables people

to make decisions about their own homes in an informed and consensual way.

Community-led retrofit projects can support large numbers of people to learn key retrofit skills, and experiment with the use of natural materials. There is a culture of resistance when it comes to learning how to use new or unfamiliar materials in the construction industry. Introducing new people to the industry can help with supporting a transition away from harmful petrochemical based materials such as PIR insulation, towards planet-friendly materials.

The local community typically understands common problems with local building styles which helps prevent a one-size-fits-all approach to retrofit.

# Prefigurative Politics

Community-led retrofit projects provide an opportunity to experiment with prefigurative politics.

Prefigurative politics is being the change that we want to see in the world now, rather than waiting for the changes to happen politically.

It's a way of living that expands the idea of politics beyond government and institutions, and in our everyday exchanges and relationships. It involves experimentation and working creatively and collectively to create environments that we want to be living and working within.

We have the power to build the future's we want in the present. Society makes us think that radical change is utopian and unimaginable, but people are already living and working in alternative and radical ways today.

There are strong DIY and experimental ideas fundamental to working prefiguratively.

It increases accessibility of activism, highlighting that we can express our opposition to the way the world works by establishing and living in the types of community we know we will thrive in.





Bottom Left to top right; Tilla, Adam, Alex W, Emma, Aisling, Mamode, Charles, Che, Steve, Kathryn, Manssor, Alex R, Harrison, Mark, Merzad and Lucy.

# What is the site workers role?



Left to right; Lucy, Sinead and Alex R

The site workers greet volunteers in the morning, take volunteers to site and teach them DIY skills and basic construction skills alongside self-helpers. Self-helpers are people within the community who are at risk of homelessness who will be moving into the house being retrofitted.

### What is involved in a typical day as a Canopy Site Worker?

- Manage day-to-day tasks on site, making sure tools and materials are available for volunteers in advance;
- Manage health and safety – doing site inductions, health and safety tours and maintaining tools;
- Facilitating volunteer learning and experimentation;
- Teaching construction skills to trades, volunteers and each other;
- Explaining building performance principles to volunteers;
- Leading conversations that challenge normative beliefs and encourage volunteers to get to know each other in a meaningful way;
- Support volunteers to think critically and engage positively in our community;
- Understanding and delivering volunteer specific support depending on the particulars of each volunteers needs;
- Deliver groupwork to develop a cohesive and empowered group of volunteers who show up for each other and support one another.

# A Typical Day on Site



Left to right; Dan, Olly, Callum, Yoseph, Emma, Adam, Natalia and Aisling.



8:30am

Volunteers arrive at the office for a cuppa & a chat.

9:00am

Volunteers & site works leave for site..

9:30am

Tasks are chosen for the day. Work begins.

11:00am

Break time! Tea, biscuits & chat.

11:30am

Back to work.

1:00pm

We leave site for the day at 1pm.

Afternoon

Site workers spend the afternoons clearing up and organising sites after the morning's activities, and buying materials and prepping for the activities the following day.

# Why does the construction industry need systemic change?

We don't want to be reproducing the same systemic issues that are rife in the construction industry, so we try to run sites a bit differently to a traditional construction site. Here is an introduction to some of the issues within the industry;

- Casual racism, sexism and homophobia are commonplace on a lot of construction sites, and maintain a culture of exclusivity that generally prevents women, people of colour and queer people from feeling comfortable on site;
- Suicide rates of construction workers in the UK are three times higher than the national average;
- 75% of people of colour working in the construction industry reported limited career progression due to their race or other protected characteristics;
- The construction industry is responsible for producing a huge amount of greenhouse gas emissions and large amounts of toxic, non-biodegradable waste annually;
- A culture of meeting minimum standards has eroded trust in the industry.





Left to right; Natalia, Kathryn, Emma and Aisling.



Left to right; Adam and Yoseph.



# How can we do things differently?

We recognise that shifting culture is a slow and deliberate task, and the changes must happen within us and work outwards into our communities and into the rest of the city.

But we do not exist in a vacuum!

We have to work on ourselves to un-learn negative biases to deliver site work in a way that transgresses mainstream oppressive cultures.

This means we don't always get everything right, but we operate within a reflexive practice framework, provide regular opportunity for feedback sessions, discussion and analysis of our practices, and are prepared to change the way we do things, and experiment with alternative models.

We try to shift culture by:

- Engaging with a broad group of organisations across the city;
- Working alongside a diverse volunteer and self-help group;
- Pushing for radical, transformative training amongst the staff team;
- Being prepared to have uncomfortable and challenging conversations to encourage transformation;
- Connecting with different small-scale, local, trade businesses to share our learning;
- Experimenting with minimally processed, natural and locally produced materials where possible, and by practicing alternative educational philosophies.

These points will be further explored in this guide.

# The Volunteer Coordinator

Canopy employs a Volunteer Coordinator who is responsible for volunteer recruitment and inducting volunteers.

Their job involves engagement with different organisations in the city to advertise volunteering at Canopy, risk assessing volunteers and getting to know them and their needs when they first join the organisation, and providing both emotional and practical support to volunteers whilst they are with Canopy.

They go about their job by:

- Developing strong relationships with other organisations who signpost potential volunteers to us. These are typically people who want to learn construction skills, or are struggling in different areas of their life, e.g. confidence building, loneliness/isolation, unemployment, addiction, mental health and learning English.

We also engage with alternative education providers for young people who struggle in the mainstream education system.

- Attempting to challenge structural inequalities by bringing on board volunteers who would find it difficult to access work in construction e.g. people recovering from strokes or brain injuries, women, trans people, people who have recently left prison etc.
- Taking a holistic approach to risk assessing each volunteer, and try to find ways to keep them and everyone else on site safe. For example, a volunteer in stroke recovery would be assigned simple tasks with lots of breaks, and their tasks will always be on the same floor as a toilet.



Left to right; Patrick, Yoseph, Che, Ashley, Yolande, Robin, Hendrick, Aisling and Aliya.



Volunteers and site works installing woodfibre insulation.

# Site Inductions

Site inductions provide site workers with an opportunity to deliver health and safety training, as well as have one-to-one time with new volunteers to find out why they want to be at Canopy, what they want to get out of the experience and assess who they might work well with on site.

During the site induction the site workers deliver the following information:

- Identify the **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations** (COSHH) file and the site-specific file, which has details of any asbestos present on site and electrical and gas safety certificates,
- **First Aid procedures** including where first aid boxes are located, recording and 'near-misses' – recording both injuries and 'near-misses' helps us to reduce the likelihood of accidents happening on site by taking measures or improving PPE (personal protective equipment) provision to keep people safe. First aid kits should be checked and updated every month.

- **Fire safety**

Volunteers are told never to attempt to put a fire out unless they've had training, which site workers have had. If they see a fire, they are told to alert the people around them by shouting, or ringing the fire bell. If there is anyone on site who's deaf they can be alerted by tapping on the shoulder and signing to go outside. Explain the location of the assembly point outside.

- **Trips, slips and falls**

Look where you're putting your feet, keep pathways clear, never leave tools on the stairs if you're working there, clean up any spillages as soon as you are aware of them. These will reduce the likelihood of slips, trips and falls.

- **Working at height**

The Health & Safety Executive produces guidance that is shared with volunteers.

- **Safe heavy lifting**

The Health & Safety Executive produces guidance that is shared with volunteers.

- Explain that legally, it is Canopy's responsibility to provide volunteers with appropriate **PPE** (Personal Protective Equipment e.g. boots, gloves, goggles, ear plugs, high vis and hard hats), and teach volunteers how to use the tools safely. It is the volunteer's responsibility to use their PPE and use the tools correctly.
- Every site should have details of how to contact HSE, who volunteers should get in contact with if they are concerned about health and safety practices on site.





Left to right; Michelle, Mei and Yoseph.

## Esperance...

*"What I think about Canopy as a volunteer who's been here for almost 3 years... I absolutely adore Canopy! Even when new members of staff arrive they quickly pick up the same vibe as older members of staff – there is definitely a culture being built here!"*

*Working with new people can be a daunting task when you're an introvert, but site workers put people together who could work well together. They know everyone, they know who will get on, they make sure you're doing ok! They listen and answer questions. I feel more confident now compared to when I first started with working with different types of people. I'm considering doing some of the things I've learnt in my own house.*



*People always ask me why I do the work if I'm not getting paid, but the skills are more important than money. Everyone feels like that – people just come without being asked to come, they just willingly and genuinely want to be here.*

*Canopy has inspired me to get my own qualifications and apply to start my Level 1 City and Guild multi-skills course. I love to be a handywoman after I've done it. All my friends are already asking me if I'll do jobs for them. Who knows – maybe I'll be a carpenter within a year!"*



# Canopy Volunteers

During inductions, volunteers are asked about:

- Whether they have any learning difficulties or physical disabilities and how we can meet their needs on site;
- Whether they struggle with their mental health and what support they get;
- What languages they speak and whether they need an interpreter to support them on site;  
details of any convictions they may have;
- If they currently or historically have struggled with addiction and if its possible for them to refrain from use of substances during volunteering,
- Whether they have any problems with their housing;
- Whether they are looking for employment.

Volunteers are also asked to sign an agreement where they commit to reflecting on their own negative biases that they will be bringing to site, and state that they recognise that Canopy is trying to upend harmful and oppressive practices that are commonplace on mainstream construction sites.

They are told that if they are exhibiting harmful behaviour towards others or making jokes at the expense of other people, particularly when relating to identity, they will be given education about why that behaviour is harmful.

The person who was harmed is given the option to be a part of that conversation too. If the behaviour is repeated they may have to give up their volunteering place.

Volunteers are offered support during their time at Canopy and often after they've left the organisation.

This includes;

- signposting to other organisations,
- emotional and mental health support,
- going on trips and training courses with Canopy, and;
- 
- practical support through being gifted laptops, sim cards and food vouchers.

The Volunteer Coordinator also organises day trips for volunteers throughout the year, including trips out to the Yorkshire Dales, walks along the canal, educational trips to learn new skills, trips to support other voluntary organisations locally, and a trip to Scarborough with the tenants in August.



Left to right; Alex W, Kev, Steve and Mossab.

## Johnson...

*"Canopy Housing is good to belong to, it is an asset and privilege for people to be a part of... to have an impact on peoples lives in our community, to leave a legacy!"*

*Canopy really good for new people who arrive in the city and meet new people and learn how to be a team together.*



*Everyone who's involved get acquainted with many skills that will help them with their careers.*

*It's a good thing to be involved in for people who are trying to get leave to remain because it shows how much people want to contribute to their communities!"*

## Francis...

*"I've been volunteering for 4 months. I had a stroke nearly 3 years ago, and I came to Canopy as part of my recovery to start doing more things out the house.*

*I really enjoy being at Canopy. I get up on a Monday morning and I have something I really want to do.*



*I'm learning painting, how to lay floors, how to do demolition. Learning new things keeps me motivated- I wouldn't do anything otherwise. Each day is different, always different tasks to do on site. I might not know what I'm doing but I'm always able to have a go!*

## Manssor...

*"I joined Canopy, a housing renovation and maintenance company in Leeds, as a volunteer in February 2024.*

*I truly consider myself one of the lucky ones to have found this wonderful opportunity. I started with one volunteer day, but after that, I felt I needed an extra day because I felt I was working in a job I truly belonged to, especially with a wonderful team that works diligently, energetically, and with a high level of professionalism.*



*It's been a rewarding experience and a milestone in my career.*

*The company provides transportation tickets and lunch at one of its cafeterias. I respect Canopy and all its employees and volunteers. I wholeheartedly hope for progress, development and prosperity in the present and future."*

## Danelly...

*"Canopy really welcomes people – it feels like you're being welcomed into a family.*

*For me its my first experience working on site, and I feel looked after.*

*I'm writing a PhD about retrofit, decarbonisation and circular economies, so I wanted to know more about how people in the construction site use and choose materials which I'm learning about at Canopy.*



*I like that they put on socials and help people get to know each other. There's so much effort put into helping volunteers integrate and work well together. It makes it really interesting to get to know people who have really different backgrounds and it feels rich to be a team with people who have difference life experiences and different skills to contribute. "*








# Transformational Group Work





*"I assume that to learn, people need to risk: to revise their conceptual framework, try a new skill, unlearn an old prejudice, admit there's something they don't know. To risk, people need safety. To be safe, they need a group and/or a teacher that supports them".*

George Lakey

Left to right; Johnson, Ming, Alex R and Danelly.

Effective group work facilitation can transform the way that site runs; how comfortable and confident volunteers feel both on and off site, how well they learn; and how likely they are to come back each week.

According to black-feminist educator bell hooks, cultivating excitement and enthusiasm for what you're learning and for one another's contribution in educational spaces is fundamental to creating an atmosphere that transgresses traditional educational spaces.

How do we cultivate excitement and enthusiasm on site?

- Get to know each of the volunteers as individuals: what are their motivations to be there, their passions and their needs based on their life experience.
- There is very often a broad swathe of different needs on a site, that are dependent on life experience and background.

Where the magic happens is when people with different life experiences come together for the same purpose and discover they have a lot in common.

- Getting to know what makes each of the different volunteers tick helps us to support conversation and relationship development between volunteers which supports the establishment of a strong group and resilient community.
- Each person on site is responsible for creating the group dynamic – let people know this –we collectively set the vibe!
- Recognise the different values and skills that each volunteer brings to the team, and celebrate their contributions individually.

# The 4 Stages of Long Term Group Work



Left to right; Yoseph, Callum, Kathryn,  
Aisling and Olly.

## 1. Forming

At this stage people are getting to know each other, and getting comfortable with being on site. Site workers can help this process by encouraging volunteers to open up about themselves and what jobs they're enjoying on site. These conversations are typically light and full of humour.

## 2. Storming

As the group starts to get to know each other, conversations tend to get a bit deeper and more meaningful. This can mean friendships start to form amongst some members of the group, or conflict can start to arise. If cliques are starting to form within the group, try to encourage people to work with people they don't often work with.

## 3. Norming.

At this stage trust is starting to be established within the group. This is where we might start to have conversations that are more vulnerable, start to become more playful with how to do different tasks on site, or encourage volunteers to experiment with taking the lead for different jobs. Site becomes more playful generally.

## 4. Performing.

Group culture has become established at this point, and jobs on site are typically done with ease and confidence, and the whole group takes responsibility for maintaining the culture they worked to establish. As volunteers or staff come and go, the dynamic may start to shift.

We regularly reflect on who is coming to site, and how the day to day is working. We ask volunteers for feedback when they stop volunteering in order to make sure we are hitting the outcomes we set out to achieve. We run workshops with small groups of volunteers to dig deeper into how to make site a more transformative space and how we can respond as an organisation, but also as a community, to social fragmentation in our city.



*"...when the group goes beyond its superficial phase of politeness to a deep acceptance of the differences within it, it frees itself for accelerated learning..."*

*"Our job as facilitators and educators is to maintain a perspective that supports everyone, margins and mainstreams alike, to stop hurting each other, to drop the judgments and get curious."*

George Lakey

Left to right; Kathryn, Emma and Natalia.

## Social Bridging or Critical Conscious Raising

We're living through a time of social polarisation, where many of us socialise exclusively with those who share our cultures and life experiences. This means our understanding of the experiences of those who are different to us is limited. This also makes us more vulnerable to believing misinformation and prevents us from building resilient communities.

In order to mitigate this, we aim to have a diverse group of people on site each day who vary along lines of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, religion and class. We stress to volunteers that building community is just as important and urgent as building homes, and we treat break times and getting to know one another as of equal importance to getting the work done.

Multiple different volunteers have fed back to us that Canopy is the only place they spend time that they do not think is segregated along race and/or class lines.



# How Canopy Encourages Social Bridging

We try to ensure that volunteers stick to the same volunteering shift so that trust is developed and there is a level of familiarity between volunteers and site workers. We've learnt that;

- Being focused on a manual job encourages people to open up and be vulnerable with one another – something that's much easier when you're busy rather than sitting across a table from one another!
- Everyone has something in common, whether that's having the same sense of humour, similar politics, or enjoying the same books and TV shows.
- Friendships formed across identity lines that usually divide us do not necessarily have the capacity to challenge the harmful or bigoted messages communicated in politics, the media or on social media.



## Steve...

*"I come to Canopy because it helps with my mental health. I have certain problems in my life.*

*I meet other people which supports me with isolation. I really enjoy meeting new people with different nationalities.*

*I feel that I'm wanted in social life when I'm at Canopy. It gives me comfort listening to people and them listening to me.*

*I'm learning new skills like getting to know how to use tools I've never used before. I'm getting satisfaction for what I'm actually doing for Canopy Housing.*

*They also offer activities like walks and trips – I just really enjoy getting out and it stops the isolation I've been suffering from.*



*Plus, there's no pressure at Canopy. You can do stuff at your own pace without being pressurised.*

*The vibe on site is brilliant. When I did my first day I learnt we all get on together really well. Getting to know new starters is fun because people become comfortable with each other really quickly.*

*The team I'm with have a really good sense of humour – you've got to have a good sense of humour. We do a bit of singing to whatever blasts from the radio. It cheers the day up you know! It's not all about getting the properties done – we take us time and enjoy what we're doing and enjoy the day. "*

Volunteers have recently asked Canopy to lead group discussions about the issues that we are facing as a community at the moment, that celebrates cultural difference and creates stronger more resilient community networks.

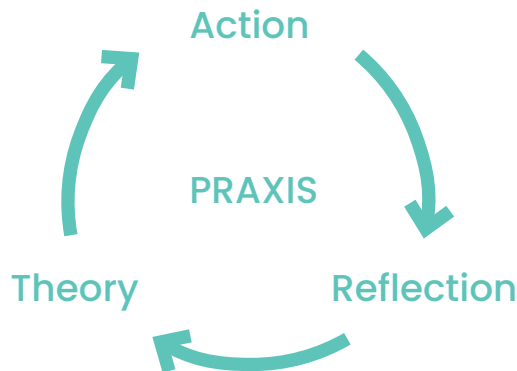
They have also suggested sharing meals that feel symbolic or important to us, watching films that explore issues that have affected volunteers, and working towards challenging some of the stigma that hold people apart.

Engagement in politicised discussion enable us to be more critically engaged in reflecting on our society and on the differences between our lived experience as a result of identity. It therefore helps us to act on transforming our communities in a better-informed way.

No one should be pushed to share personal information about themselves.

It's important to note that there are some members of our community who are taking more risk to be a part of these conversations as a result of the levels of discrimination they face.

It is far riskier for people of colour to engage in conversations about race and racism than it is for white people. People who are seeking asylum may not feel comfortable to disclose their immigration status due to fear of persecution.



It is essential that site workers are engaged in their own personal ‘unlearning’ journeys outside of the organisation, to challenge their own baggage they are bringing to site, to boost confidence for challenging issues other people bring, and be able to pick up on microaggressions and oppressive subtleties developing in relationships between other individuals on site. We have

monthly reading / (un)learning discussion groups that help us boost our knowledge and be able to hold one another to account. Volunteers who are trans may not feel comfortable to discuss gender due to the prevalence of mainstream transphobic rhetoric in politics and the media.

It’s important as site worker to hold this information as sensitive, and honour the risk that some people have to take to be in diverse spaces with people they do not know let alone engaging in vulnerable conversations.



Please see the reading list at the end for useful resources!



## Theory: Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968)

When training people on site, we try to use education principles based on a theory of education explored by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

It is a theory about the necessity of a bottom up education system to empower people who are oppressed by the current system and support them into becoming individuals and communities who are more able to engage in democracy and challenge the dominant cultures within the system.

Freire says that the mainstream educational system, which he calls the 'Banking System' of education treats students as empty vessels that need filling up, suppressing their own lived experience to become people who can operate successfully within the oppressive systems we live in.

People are at the mercy of the educator to decide what information is important. There is very little space for people to establish their own opinions and apply their life experience to whatever they're learning. This creates a passive culture within communities where people feel disempowered to contribute to how their community functions.

Democratic education sees all people in educational settings as both student and teacher. Every person in the room is experienced enough to have an opinion or a judgement on any subject matter. Their responses to the information or activity *is* the lesson, rather than the subject they're learning about. It is about learning through experience, and applying every person's lived experience to the subject.

This increases the accessibility of education – by allowing people to learn at their own pace, and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enabling them to question and analyse perceived wisdom.

This type of experiential learning allows people to develop a better analysis and critique of the information they're given. It means they're less likely to absorb information they're given as fact and their critical analysis skills are developed.

Freire says this allows people to become fully participating members of a democracy, rather than just reproducing the ideas of the dominant voices in the population. It creates space for a less hegemonic political landscape of a country to allow greater scope for shifting systems of oppression.

It empowers the learner to develop their own skillset that will challenge power structures that negatively affect their lives.

Freire refers to a concept he calls 'Praxis' – which is a process of identifying a problem within our community through dialogue, theory and exposure, and initiating liberatory action that seeks to transform the issue to create a more just and equal society. It is a cyclical process that is constantly being reflected on, with actions developed and amended depending on outcomes.

It is a useful process to encourage emergent delivery strategies that are grounded in existing issues and that seek to ensure the group or organisation is operating in response to social or political changes in our communities as they unfold.

It also helps with making sure the organisation is not straying from its core values. It's a learning process that requires constant personal and group reflection.

# Transformative (Transgressive) Education

Canopy works alongside, and on behalf of, some of the most marginalised people in the city. Many of which have had bad experiences with mainstream education systems, have experienced state or interpersonal violence, struggle with their physical or mental health and feel disempowered in their lives to make genuine change to the issues they're facing.

We aim to run 'problems-based' construction sites, where people bring their life baggage and challenges and we hope to enable them to use the relationships they build on site, and their experiences they have on site, to reclaim the sense of power they have over their own lives.

The aim is to support them to build their own self-confidence, and have a positive impact on transforming the communities they are part of and the city more broadly.

We know each person is the expert on finding solutions to problems in their own lives, they often just need some support exploring issues and building confidence to realise it!





Left to right; Sinead, Emil, Til, Ali and Igor.

Canopy employs community workers and alternative education providers as site workers, rather than people who have extensive experience within the construction industry. This means that site workers typically have experiences with delivering group work that is transformative, and can support people to challenge their normative beliefs.

It also supports the establishment of a culture of experimentation and curiosity amongst both site workers and volunteers about how to do the job in front of them rather than proscribed ways of doing things.

This is to rebalance power dynamics on site between site workers and volunteers, and enables all people on site to bring their own experiences and thought processes to solve the problem in front of them.

Site workers always stress that there is no one right way of doing any job, and encourage volunteers to explore solutions through dialogue and experimentation.

Volunteers are given a few pointers and guidance, but they decide their own way of doing things (so long as it adheres to health and safety).

We create space where people can ask questions and to learn through experimenting together – or learning through doing.

We try to ensure good tool management so that people can facilitate their own jobs; taking ownership over tools. We deliver regular toolbox talks, where people are taught one specific skill as a group, or one particular element about health and safety that is specific to the site they are on.

We invite volunteers to step into a role and take ownership over it rather than delegating tasks. This helps volunteers to feel respected, boosts confidence, encourages people to take ownership of their own learning and of site completion, and helps keep people engaged.

We encourage people to take ownership by;

- Giving volunteers a choice about which jobs they'd like to do. Write a list of all the jobs you'd like to achieve by the end of the week, and allow volunteers to choose which jobs they'd like to be responsible for.
- If you have heard a volunteer voice interest in learning a particular skill, leave jobs that relate to that skill for that volunteer so that they can gain experience and see if they'd like to pursue the skill further.
- If a volunteer starts but doesn't finish a job which they've been enjoying, save it for them for the next time they come to site if possible.
- Always doing with, never doing for or to!



Left to right; Johnson, Sinead, Til, Ismail  
and Milly.

# Asking Good Questions

Every person has something useful to teach the other people around them. We all have worthy life experiences and expertise that can help other people learn something new, or learn to think in new ways.

## What is a good question?

Asking good open questions and being a good listener helps to build confidence in people who don't see themselves as experts.

They can help us to use our individual knowledge to create new ideas and helps us to grow as people and as a community.

Being asked a good question can help us to overcome our blocks to new ideas, and helps us take ownership of our own, new ideas – something that is particularly useful when trying to shift challenging behaviours and ideas that cause hurt to the people around us.

## Reflective Questioning

Often people make throwaway statements that are harmful towards themselves or other people, without really thinking about the wider impact on their own self-worth, or on community building.

## Tips for asking questions that challenge normative belief systems and encourage transformation:

Question whether people really feel the way that they say they do...

- Is that really their lived experience?
- Is that something they've had exposure to?
- Where did they hear that information?
- Why do they think that information they've heard is being portrayed?

Always ask open-ended questions as it requires people to expand on their answers. Offer your opinion and see what they think of that. Open up the conversation to other people in the room.

Reflective questioning also helps people to think more deeply around the issues they're facing and realise their own capacity for change. It is fundamental to successful group dynamics when issues arise.

In order to do reflective questioning it's important to focus on exploring the issue rather than being persuasive – offering unsolicited advice can create resistance to change.

As the listener, it's important to reflect what you've heard back to the person speaking, and letting them feel how they engage with the statements they've made.

It's also important to emphasise autonomy, and make sure the person knows that ultimately it is their choice whether they change or not.

Usually, when questioned on harmful beliefs, people say that they have heard that viewpoint on the radio, or from a friend and regurgitated it without thinking critically about it. Challenging beliefs through dialogue is a great way to help develop people's critical consciousness, and upskill people for challenging harmful beliefs outside of Canopy.



Alex...

*"The biggest thing I love about Canopy is I don't feel like an odd ball. I'm not this freak, I'm just someone that's a bit sensitive but its not something I'm judged for. I feel like I fit in, I'm just a person at Canopy.*

*Sometimes I can be in the worst mood when I arrive at Canopy and I come out at the end of the day and I'm happy.*

*The site workers are so good at listening and in-depth conversations. They work really hard to make sure everyone feels safe, but everyone's also really funny we have a proper laugh, everyone's so sound.*

*Obviously learning the skills is important, but we're given so much agency about what we learn. We get to choose how to spend our time, and the*



*site workers prioritise giving us jobs that we find fun or want to learn more about. We're also an integral part of the decision making about how to do jobs, and what decisions are made about site. You feel really valued and important!*

*We're a bit like one big dysfunctional family. My team is great, we've gotten to know each other so well, and we all bring really different skills and vibes to site! People are honest about what they're struggling with and we're able to support each other and big each other up. It's lovely. We have the same goals and have a proper laugh, but all banter is so innocent. There's no malice, no shaming, no one gangs up! "*

# Restorative Practice – Cultivating a Call-in Culture

Cultivating a call-in culture, by naming systemic oppression as it arises, recognising that oppressive ways of thinking live within all of us, and being committed to unlearning our own negative biases

*“Cancel culture entrenches people in their beliefs, especially if they then become isolated. We need to be more curious about peoples viewpoints rather than hate them for their viewpoints.”*

## Canopy volunteer

Canopy is a uniquely multicultural and diverse building site. We must acknowledge that all people on the site will be bringing their own biases and world views that may be harmful or offensive to other people on the site.

We recognise that all people experience oppression in some way, with some identities experiencing more interpersonal and state led oppressions than others, particularly in a building site context.

Although historically we have operated on a zero tolerance of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, islamophobia and antisemitism (to name some) framework, volunteers have called on the organisation to shift towards a restorative practice style of conflict management for which we are awaiting training. This will be accessible to all staff, volunteers and board members.



Left to right; Lee, Lucy, Sinead, Tilla and Kathryn.

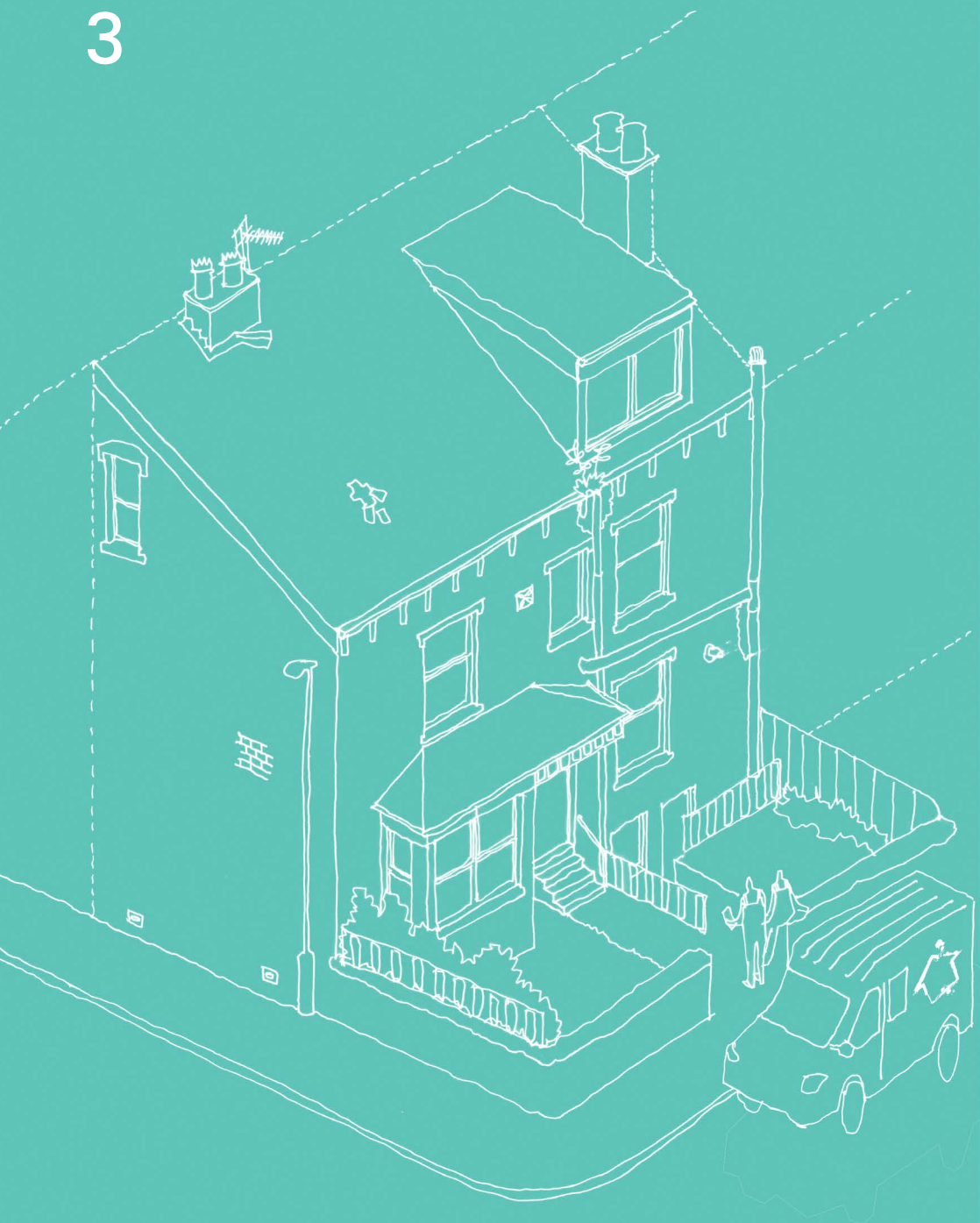


Left to right; Mark, Alsayadi, Sidra, Lucy,  
Nic, Alex W, Steve, Dannelly, Doug, Emma  
and Emma's fella.

We collectively recognise that 'call-in' culture and restorative practice offers more opportunity for behaviour change, inclusion and community cohesion than punitive conflict management  
In practice, this looks like;

- Trusting that often the perpetrator was not trying to be malicious, but is reproducing information that they have been told on the TV, in the pub, in the newspaper etc.
- Asking the person who was offended how they want to proceed: Do they want to be involved in restorative practice conversations? What do they want the action to be as a result of the harm caused?
- Ask good questions to the perpetrator to challenge misinformation, or harmful narratives. Give them all the information and be a good listener to their answers. See if you can apply any of the narratives to their own lives.
- Offer resources to help them develop their understanding of the issue, and go through those resources together.
- Remind the perpetrator that raising an issue is an act of love as it comes from a place of knowing they can do better.
- Know that if they are reluctant to shift their viewpoint or mindset it mightn't be the best place for them to volunteer but offer to do some further one-to-one support work.
- Let other volunteers who were present on site know what happened and what the outcome was, either anonymously, or with consent of the volunteers who had a conflict.

3





# Professional Boundaries



Professional boundaries are ethical limits that prevent exploitation and harm to be caused to people within the organisation.



Left to right; Sidra and Alex R.

In practice, this looks like:

- Reflecting on your personal power in the setting, and understanding the impact that your words and actions have as a result of that power. When the people you are working with need support, and you hold the resources and knowledge to support them you are in a position of power;
- Avoiding unwelcome touching, or touching that could be interpreted as sexually inappropriate – be aware of the histories of the people you are working with.
- Not developing sexual or financial relationships with the people you are working with;
- Not sharing unnecessary personal information;
- Not expecting or trying to get direct support back from the people you are working with. Some conversations maybe indirectly supportive but do not go into conversations with an agenda of gaining emotional support from someone you are supposed to be supporting;

*“Empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (Educators) who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive... When (educators) bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all knowing, silent interrogators.”*

Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks



- Remembering that each of the volunteers you are working with have different support needs and vulnerabilities. Each boundary maybe different with each individual person depending on their vulnerabilities. Try to meet their needs without over stepping your own boundaries.
- Bringing our own vulnerabilities and authenticity to support work and to alternative education provision enables the development of genuine relationships built on trust and mutual exchange. Sharing our own experiences to prove ourselves, or to meet our own personal or emotional needs is not bringing authenticity to the relationships.
- If you are sharing personal experiences to aid the development of the group and take personal risks yourself, then it's a different story.

## Harrison...

*"Canopy's a pretty good place you know. Very friendly. Everyone loves a good laugh which you rarely find these days. The site workers are super friendly and if you don't feel up to something you're never forced but they help you through it and then you realise you can do it.*

*Its good for boosting confidence and knowing yourself. Good for confidence around like, how to use ladders and working with new people. I used to never talk to people, I was a person of great quietness, and now I wont shut up!*

*Everyone is so friendly and no one ever judges anyone for anything so you know you can express yourself and it will be ok! Its taught me that I can be an absolute laugh at times.*



*I've got ADHD and there's other people with ADHD here and we can talk about it and find out tips about how to cope from each other.*

*I left school early because they always focused on teaching stuff that I will never use in life and the teachers always expected me to be able to do things first time and were pretty mean when I couldn't do it so I was in trouble. I feel like someone's always going to lend a hand when I'm struggling at Canopy."*

## Ronny...

*"I've been working with Canopy for about a year now and so far so good. Been great actually.*

*Management are super friendly, they keep me in the loop with what's happening on site and in the organisation.*

*I've had loads of training and they say if I need any support then they are there to help with anything with any issues or any questions with how to do stuff.*

*I've learnt a load of new skills. Before working here I was subcontracting and working in occupied houses doing internal wall insulation with mineral wool and PIR - I'd never used wood fibre before.*



*The new skills I've got are helping my business grow. It's been an experience and a good opportunity.*

*Also feels really nice to be properly rooted in the community and get to know the community better.*

*I've made a couple big mistakes on site but I get second chances which I've really appreciated because it means I keep learning.*



## Working with private contractors

At Canopy, neither volunteers nor site workers are responsible for high risk or specialist jobs, unless they are formally trained. Typically, we work with private contractors for roofing, repointing, window and door fitting, plumbing and electrics.

If we are struggling with a deadline, we will ask contractors to come in to help with woodwork and plastering so as to minimise excessive pressure on volunteers.

We are also keen to work with small businesses to share our learning related to using natural materials, supporting them to move away from using materials that are harmful to the environment and to peoples health.

We see this as an obligation for supporting a city wide transition towards more eco-friendly buildings, a healthier city and boosting local supply-chains for earth friendly materials.

We require that tradespeople we work with are prepared to work in an unusual construction setting.

We ask them to sign up to an agreement that confirms that the people contracted to work on our sites share similar values to us, and are moving in the service of our vision for our sites and for the city generally.

We try to give contractors with less experience opportunities to work on our sites, meaning we might have to support them with training, but we see this as supporting the upskilling of our community.

When we start work with a new contractor, they are required to sign an agreement before starting any work with us. The agreement includes, but is not limited to, the following points:

- Communicating effectively and accessibly with tenants, staff and volunteers about decisions contractors making about properties;
- Having a responsibility to accommodate the concerns of tenants;
- Ensuring the contractor maintains promised timescales to the best of their ability;
- A willingness to let volunteers and staff members shadow them on site;
- Keeping noise to a minimum;
- Health and safety responsibilities;
- Explaining the importance of confidentiality and why DBS checks may be required before working with some tenants;
- To treat all tenants, staff, volunteers, and any other people you may work with respect and dignity, free from discrimination and prejudice.

## The Jasons...

*"We have been working for Canopy on and off for the last 10 years.*

*A Canopy building site is completely different to a standard building site. Health and safety is still important but its more friendly and relaxed.*

*We try to be accommodating with volunteers, and try not to disrupt their work continuity when we're all on site together and let them watch our work and plastering techniques.*



*With tenants we treat them as like any domestic job and work around them and leave their houses clean and tidy.*

*We enjoy working with Canopy as we're made to feel like part of the team and we're called upon for advice and its fulfilling to work for and with a charity (and they provide nice biscuits from time to time)."*

## Further Reading

- Emergent Strategy – adrienne maree-brown
- Teaching Community. A Pedagogy of Hope – bell hooks
- Teaching to Transgress. Education as a Practice of Freedom – bell hooks
- Feminism is For Everybody – bell hooks
- Poverty Safari – Darren McGarvey
- 100 Ways to Transform Building Site Culture – Emma Appleton
- Know Your Place: Essays on the Working Class by the Working Class – Faiza Shaheen
- Facilitating Group Learning – George Lakey
- Gender: A Graphic Guide – Meg-John Barker
- Social Class in the 21 st Century – Michael Savage
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed – Paulo Friere
- Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race – Reni Eddo-Lodge

# Playlist

As selected by everyone on site.

- 22nd Century – Nina Simone
- Rusted Root – Send Me On My Way
- Despacito – Fonsy
- Rivers Of Babylon – Melodians
- U.N.I.T.Y. – Queen Latifah
- Lean On Me – B. B. Seaton
- Set You Free – N Trance
- All Star- Smash Mouth
- They Reminisce Of You – Pete Rock and C. L. Smooth
- Where I'm From – Digable Planets
- Lazy – X-Press, David Byrne
- Something Good – Utah Saints
- Get Busy – Sean Paul
- Family Affair – Mary J Blige
- Water No Get Enemy – Fela Kuti
- Coat Of Many Colours – Dolly Parton
- Ain't Got No, I Got Life – Nina Simone
- Look At Your Hands – Tune-Yards
- Blind – Hercules and Love Affair
- Do Wop (That Thing) – Lauren Hill
- Only You – Yazoo
- Jezahel – Shirley Bassey
- Annie's Song – John Denver
- Do Nothing – The Specials
- Smalltown Boy – Bronski Beat
- Flowers – Sweet Female Attitude (Sunship Remix)
- Street Life – Randy Crawford
- Silly Games – Janet Kay
- Work – Rihanna

[Click here to access the  
Canopy Site Playlist...](#)



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