IGNITE PHILANTHROPY
inspiring the end to violence against girls and boys

SOIF School of International Futures

Sprout

Nurturing Leadership for Safer Childhoods

The Story of Sprout
2024-2026 Impact Report





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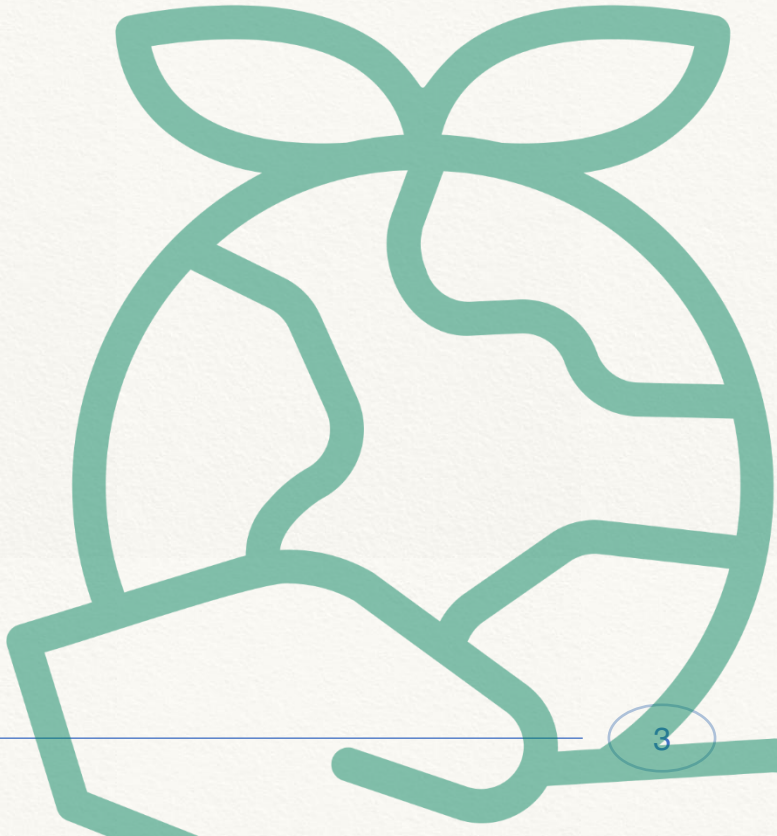
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Sprout

Nurturing Leadership for Safer Childhoods:
The Story of Sprout

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I. Introduction

**Rather than defining a new model of leadership,
Sprout set out to create different conditions for youth leadership.**

The story of change is often told through outcomes: what was built, what shifted, what moved forward. When we focus only on these "whats," most investment naturally goes into programmes and tactics. But the future we are working toward is far more ambitious. It is a world where violence against children is eradicated, and where children and young people can exercise their rights, shape their futures, and live in peace. Reaching that future requires us to nurture the people who carry this work — the leaders driving radical change in difficult conditions.

Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End to Violence Against Girls and Boys (Ignite Philanthropy) partnered with the School of International Futures to tell a different story about leadership. Sprout began with a simple recognition: if we keep asking leaders to follow the same scripts and meet the same expectations, we risk reinforcing the very patterns we hope to dismantle — competition, burnout, and hierarchy. Instead, Sprout set out to support the next generation of system leaders committed to children 's safety and well-being, using a care-of-the-whole-person approach.



Sprout retreat in Kenya, 10-14 September 2025

For young leaders immersed in work as complex as childhood sexual violence, this tension is particularly acute. They are closest to the lived realities of a horrendous issue, yet often farthest from the spaces where leadership is recognised. They are asked to lead while also being asked—often implicitly—to prove that they can. In a world marked by growing uncertainty and strained systems, this space that prioritises care and collaboration is increasingly necessary, particularly in the child rights field, where power is uneven and pathways to influence are limited.

Sprout was created to nurture youth leaders who can carry change in ways that are shared, grounded in agency, and can hold complexity and uncertainty. Rather than offering a new leadership model, Sprout focused on creating different conditions for leadership to emerge. What took shape was not a framework or a script, but a recognition: **leadership is a story we are writing together.** It grows through interaction, reflection, and collaboration. This collective story creates space for different voices, experiences, and ways of leading to influence the work, making it more grounded, responsive, and able to evolve.

This kind of leadership requires time, care, and openness — and above all, nurturing.

Across two cohorts from 2024 to 2026, 60 Sprout Fellows and Learning Partners from Africa, Canada, Europe, and the United States helped shape this emerging perspective on leadership. Our first report, released in 2025, focused on the pilot programme and its early lessons. This second report brings together reflections from both cohorts, tracing how Sprout participants showed up differently, worked with others, and engaged systems with greater clarity and intention. Their insights offer guidance for a broader field seeking to cultivate this transformative approach to leadership to advance children 's wellbeing and safety.

II. Stories of Change

Change moves through people— in how they see and care for themselves, how they relate to others, and how they engage with the systems around them. These layers are deeply interconnected. When one shifts, the others follow.

For many Sprout Fellows, the work of addressing childhood violence is not only professional; it is personal. Some carry lived experience, while others hold the stories and expectations of the communities they serve. This means navigating emotional weight, responsibility, and a deep sense of accountability — often with limited resources and support. In this context, the line between work and personal well-being blurs. The pressure to say yes, to take on more, and to keep pushing forward is constant. Being young within these systems adds another layer: hierarchy, unequal access to decision-making, and the fear of not being seen as "ready" or "capable" shape how leadership is experienced and enacted.

The stories in this report trace shifts across three dimensions of change:



Personal level

Change begins with agency—the moment someone recognises their own voice, their judgment, and their place in the work.



Relational level

Change takes shape through trust—in how people listen, collaborate, and carry responsibility together.



Systemic level

Change becomes visible in how people engage with the structures around them. They begin to re-imagine and transform systems.

Across these levels, a broader pattern emerges: when leadership is held differently, it changes how people act, relate, and move toward shared goals.

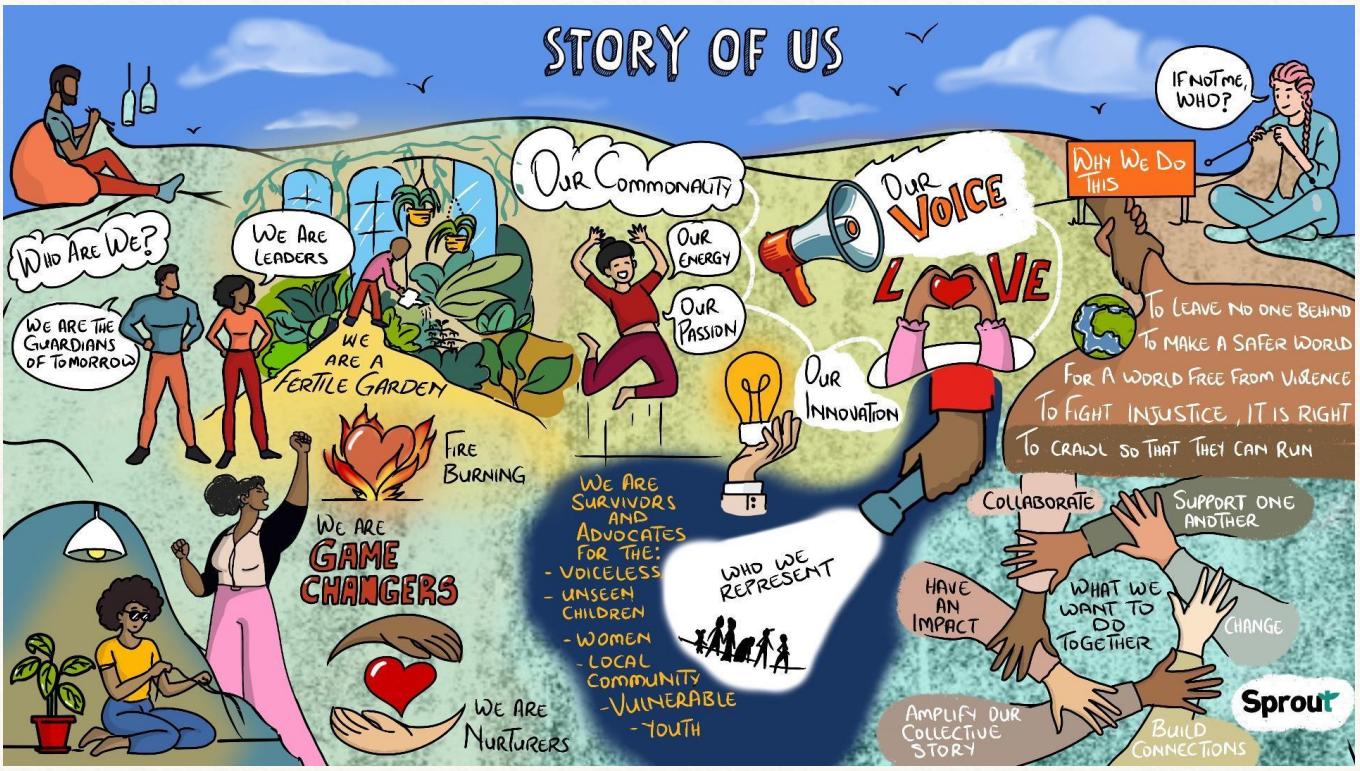
1 Personal: Reclaiming Agency

Leadership is often imagined as beginning with certainty. In reality, it often begins the moment someone stops waiting for permission.

For many Sprout Fellows, that moment was not loud or hyper-visible. Their power showed up in small but meaningful ways, including choosing to speak, making a decision, or trusting their own judgment without seeking validation. These moments were held together by a caring collective that reframed what it means to be seen, and how one sees oneself.

Many Fellows described leadership as something that had felt conditional: dependent on external affirmation, on proving themselves, or on performing competence. This led to deferred decisions, silenced voices, and self-doubt shaping when and how they showed up.

Unlike traditional leadership programmes, in Sprout, young people were not instructed to "be more confident." Instead, it created a space where they could see themselves differently and recognise that what they brought into a room held inherent value.





'Story of Us' created by Sprout Fellows from both cohorts during the storytelling exercise in 2024 and 2025. They represent a collective narrative that encapsulates who they are, what they represent, why they are committed to their work and what their collective mission and values are.

> Before I joined Sprout, I thought that if I did not get affirmation from people, then I was doing something wrong. But along that journey I realised that I may not always get the affirmation I want but that does not mean that I am wrong. By believing that; what I have to say, what I bring into a room, my ideas and skills are very worthy and are mine to own. I began to feel and see things differently around me. I believe in the decisions I make in my work and my personal life. Even when I am in doubt, I do my best knowing that I am where I am supposed to be and doing what I am supposed to be doing. Sometimes I may be afraid of taking steps but I step back and see where I have come from and keep pushing. It is a great feeling that I feel will keep unlocking my potential, at my work, with my relationships and every aspect of my life.
>
> - Yvonne Njoka, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Participants came to understand that uncertainty would remain the only constant. Instead of waiting for it to disappear, they learned to move with it. Self-doubt didn ’t vanish, but it no longer dictated their choices.

The shift toward ownership became visible when Fellows stopped trying to become leaders, because they realised they already were. Little by little, authority became grounded in lived experience, their own judgment, and a growing sense of agency. Therefore, leadership no longer depended on recognition from others and began with recognition of self.

2 Relational: Connection and Co-Creation

Change is not an individual endeavour. It moves through relationships—how people meet, listen, and build together.

Many Fellows had long been connected to others working on similar issues, but those relationships were often shaped by hierarchy, roles, or the need to prove oneself. They expressed that these boundaries were hindering creativity.

What shifted through Sprout was not just access to new relationships, but the nature of those relationships. Participants began to show up differently—with greater ownership, vulnerability, openness, and willingness to listen and co-create. Relationships became less about proving themselves and more about building together.

> I often limited myself to familiar spaces and networks. What was different this time was how I related to others, with openness, confidence, and a sense of equal partnership. I was more willing to share my ideas, listen actively, and build on others ' perspectives without fear. There was mutual respect, trust, and a shared purpose, which made the collaboration more meaningful and impactful.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Two years after the first iteration of Sprout, Fellows reported this relational shift unfolding in different ways. They reached out to people and institutions beyond their usual networks, entering conversations across sectors and geographies that once felt out of reach. They engaged these spaces with greater clarity and self-assuredness.

> Before Sprout, I was more reserved in sharing challenges. Through the programme, I became more open and intentional in conversations, creating space for honest exchange and mutual learning. Previously, I saw leadership more as something individual. After Sprout, it feels more collective. Leadership is less about holding something alone, and more about building shared direction, trust, and responsibility with others.
>
> - Zorana Parezanović, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Trust grew through mutual respect and shared commitment. As a result, collaboration moved beyond coordination into co-creation. Leadership was no longer something held individually. And because it was carried collectively, it created space for shared experiences—shared success, burdens, and responsibility. The work no longer had to be held alone.

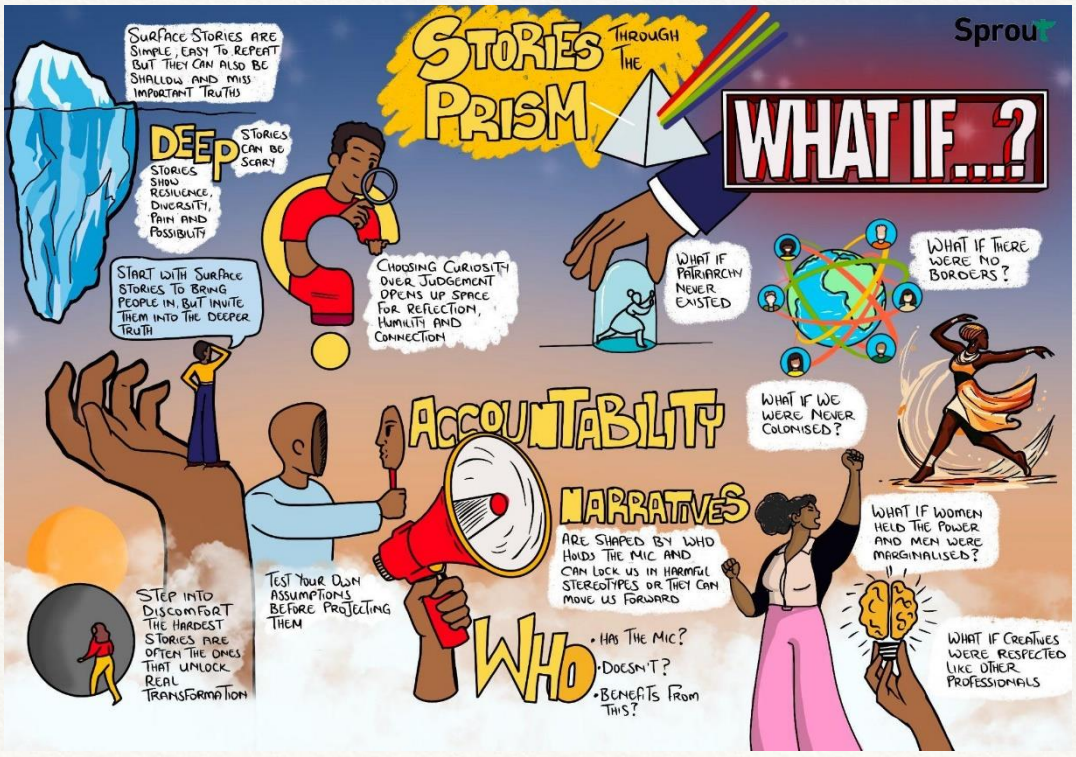
3 Systemic: Our Role and Influence in Systems

Systems-level change requires understanding how people, institutions, decisions, and histories interact— and recognising one 's own role within that whole.



During the 2025 retreat, we showcased the 2024 retreat moment

Sprout did not "bring in" anyone into the system. Fellows have been engaging with these systems long before this programme existed: leading initiatives, advocating for policies, and responding to urgent needs. But many described their work as reactive, shaped by immediate demands and unexamined assumptions. In some ways, they saw their efforts to change the system as existing outside of it.



Fellows explored ways to transform systems during the retreat in Kenya, 2025.



Artistic imaginations from Fellows during the retreat in Kenya, 2025.

Through Sprout, Fellows began to see their work as part of a broader system made of interconnected actors, power dynamics, and lived realities. This shifted how they understood the work and how they moved within the system.

Fellows recognised their existing roles and identified opportunities to impact shifts within the system. This realisation revealed tensions and disconnections. One of the main questions across both cohorts related to whose knowledge was centred by the system—who are the dominant decision-makers? Do they reflect communities most affected by childhood violence?

Fellows consistently emphasised the importance of lived experience, especially survivor voices.

> Many young leaders are not just passionate about this work; they carry lived experiences of the very issues they are fighting against. I am one of those young leaders with lived experience. Growing up, what hurt me most was not just what happened, but the silence around it. When I later had the opportunity to access education, I made a decision to use my voice to challenge these injustices and to fill the gaps that I, and so many other girls in my community, experienced. Programmes like Sprout make a difference because they do more than train young leaders; they believe in them, invest in them, and walk alongside them. When organisations choose to trust young people in this way, they are not just supporting individuals, they are strengthening movements and creating lasting change in communities.
>
> - Brendah Aryatugumya, Sprout Fellow 2023-2024

This recognition reshaped how participants approached their work. They engaged institutions with more clarity, understanding both constraints and points of influence. They moved between spaces with greater intention, drawing on relationships built through the programme, meeting uncertainty with curiosity, and connecting efforts that had previously remained separate.

Participants also began to design differently — not because the work itself changed, but because they held the work differently. In that shift, leadership moved from being a position within the system to a way of shaping the system from within.

> The collective story we developed in 2024 still instils hope in me of a justice system that equalises all. That image also reflected the new era led by women in ensuring children are protected and safe. This understanding has remained with me. While there have been and will be challenges that will affect us, we remain hopeful because systems thinking and a holistic approach to child protection will effectively ensure and ascertain the reality of a future where all children are cared for and safe within their environments.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

III. Nurturing Leadership

How Change Took Shape

Across these shifts, a pattern becomes clear: leadership was not a defined model to teach or impose, but something to be practised.

Within Sprout, leadership is understood as a story we are writing together. It takes shape in the everyday choices Fellows make, in how they work with others, and in how they navigate the realities of their work.

This story unfolds through exercising agency, reflection, and collaboration. It is a process of discovery and self-discovery: understanding one ’s role while also shaping it in relation to others and to the work itself. In that sense, leadership becomes something that is continuously formed. It is grounded in context, shaped through relationships, and responsive to the questions each Fellow is carrying.



Various ways to facilitate reflections and group exercises during the retreat in Kenya, 2025.

This was made possible by how the space was designed. Sprout functioned less as a programme to deliver content and more as a kind of gymnasium where systems leadership, collaboration, and creativity could be strengthened. Fellows were not asked to demonstrate readiness or arrive with clear answers. They were given time, freedom, and support to play and experiment with ideas, reflect on their experiences, and make decisions in real time.

> From my experience in other trainings and fellowships, there is often an unspoken expectation that you should already know something before you arrive that you need to come prepared or ‘qualified' to be in the space. What made Sprout different was that it removed that pressure. It created an environment where you could simply show up as you are, with openness and willingness to learn. That shift matters. When young people feel they don ’t have to perform or prove themselves, they are more present, more honest, and more willing to grow.
>
> - Kenneth Usoro, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

How These Conditions Emerged

These conditions emerged through a whole-person approach. Fellows consistently spoke about the need to receive and offer holistic support, not only in how they think, but also in how they relate to others and act in their work.

Each Fellow had access to one-to-one coaching sessions.

Rather than being evaluative or outcome-driven, sessions were structured as open space for Fellows to think through decisions, tensions, and questions on their own terms. Over time, participants learnt how to use this space to pause, reflect on their leadership, and consider their own growth and well-being.

The in-person retreat and the sessions on systems, narrative, and foresight followed a similar logic.

They were designed as experiential entry points rather than a fixed curriculum. Fellows explored ideas through painting, playdough, stitching, writing, embodiment, drama, meditation, and other creative practices. This allowed them to personalise their learning and follow their own curiosity.



Fellows used different mediums to express their ideas.



Quiz night during the retreat in Kenya, 2025.

Fellows engaged with concepts through discussion, application, and exchange, grounding them in their own contexts rather than absorbing them as abstract frameworks. Community was nourished not only through learning but also through dance, song, food, games, and time in nature. The retreat intentionally valued the full self. It stepped away from traditional learning formats built around instruction and slideshows, and instead centred people as people. This space allowed Fellows to zoom out from the urgency of their daily work. Many later chose to integrate these methods into their own professional and personal practices



Expressing and reflecting through movement, song, and music, Kenya, 2025.

> I learnt to step back to focus on my wellbeing and guide my mind, so I can have the right energy to show up for others.
>
> - Lorna Okeng Atim, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

All Fellows had access to an impact fund.

These funds were flexible and could be used for anything aligned with the Fellows ' collective vision. They could be used for personal development, strengthening relationships, advancing their work at a systems level, and more. The fund was neither competitive nor tied to predefined outputs. This signalled trust that Fellows could decide what they needed and how best to invest in their own growth and work.

Initially, some Fellows found it difficult to believe that the impact fund was meant to serve *them*. Over time, they overcame that hesitation and leveraged the funds in a wide range of meaningful ways: from therapy and public speaking classes to self-organised exchange visits and advocacy campaigns.

> For the first time in my life, there're people willing to invest in me; not as a project, but a person.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

> Trust young leaders with both resources and autonomy. What makes Sprout powerful is not just the funding, but the flexibility and trust embedded in it. Young leaders are often over-structured and under-trusted. Programmes that allow space for reflection, adaptation, and personal growth, not just outputs, create deeper, more sustainable impact. Especially in the child rights space, where many young leaders are working from lived experience, it is important to recognise that healing, learning, and leadership are interconnected. Supporting the person is just as important as supporting the project.
>
> - Olamilekan Olajubu, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026



Every Fellow was paired with a Learning Partner.

Learning Partners were individuals with experience in the field, including advocates, academics, practitioners, and researchers working across the child rights space. While these relationships were intergenerational, they were not structured as traditional, one-way mentorship, nor were they confined to a pre-defined project timeline or scope. This created space for a deeper and genuine exchange, where both individuals brought experience, perspective, and questions to the table. This allowed leadership to be shared across roles and generations, rather than being defined by them.

In many cases, these relationships extended beyond the one-to-one space. Learning Partners supported Fellows and their wider teams, shared resources, connected networks, and continued conversations long after the programme ended. Many remain in contact, carrying the relationship forward as part of an ongoing exchange.

> In my engagement with Zeudi the founder of Future Rights, who was also my learning partner, previously, I would have felt intimidated and held back. But through Sprout, I showed up openly sharing my ideas, asking questions, and engaging as an equal. What was different was how I related: I shifted from self-doubt to confidence, and from seeking approval to building a genuine, collaborative connection grounded in shared purpose.
>
> - Namawejje Hajarah, Sprout Fellow 2023-2024

> We were discussing my Fellow's work, the challenges around child safeguarding in his context, and possible next steps. I realised I was asking better questions and resisting the quick solutions. I was more attentive to what was locally grounded and feasible. Good lesson for me and an important shift from expert advice to a more relational form of leadership.
>
> - Veronika Odinokova, Learning Partner 2025-2026

> When I worked with Abdul, my paired Fellow, it was the first time I engaged directly with a male Fellow and learnt from him. This year, I am paired with another male Fellow, which has further enriched my experience and offered me new perspectives. It has also made my community work with boys and men much easier. This learning partnership motivates me because Fellows are so open-minded, attentive, and willing to make themselves available.
>
> - Abiba Abdallah, Learning Partner 2024-2025 and 2025-2026



Embodiment and reflection were woven into the routine through guided meditation, visioning, breathwork, play, and time in nature.

These were not isolated activities but regular practices that created moments to slow down, notice how participants were showing up, and engage with the work in creative ways. This proved to be an effective way to foster innovation beyond immediate action. In a field shaped by urgency and complexity, these practices helped ground leadership in presence as well as in foresight.



Morning guided meditation during the retreat in 2025.



Nature walks near the Maanzoni Lodge in Kenya, 2025.

> When I started seriously thinking about my individual wellness needs, I realised I can never show up for my community if I ’m not whole or enough. Realising that personal welfare is a huge part of leadership was a positive turning point in my journey with Sprout.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

Together, these elements created conditions where leadership did not need to be performed. It could be practised and shaped over time through experience, reflection, and interaction.

> If I could give one piece of advice, it would be to create space for young leaders to lead, experiment, and learn from each other, while also providing flexible funding for them to implement their ideas. Programmes like Sprout work best when young people are not just participants, but active decision-makers who can share their ideas, challenge assumptions, and collaborate across cultures. Open dialogue, mentorship, and peer learning are important, but they should be matched with trust and practical support. When young leaders are given both responsibility and resources, they build confidence, creativity, and strong networks that can drive real and lasting change in the child rights space.
>
> - Lamecks Kiyare, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

IV. Recommendations for the Child Rights Field

The shifts described in this report emerged from specific conditions. These conditions can be cultivated with intention in many settings, including across the broader child rights field.

Across Fellows ’ reflections, several themes emerge. Rather than a set of prescriptions, they serve as guiding principles, grounded in what participants themselves experienced as meaningful and necessary.

Fellows also pointed to something less explicit but equally important: their connection with those who designed the programmes and held these spaces. How we show up shapes the programme as much as its formal structure. Many of the most significant shifts did not come only from planned activities, but from what Fellows observed in practice — in the way facilitators listened, responded, and embodied the values of the programme.

This highlights that cultivating these conditions requires alignment between the programme and the people behind it. The relationships, behaviours, and ways of working that we hope to strengthen in the child rights field must also be modelled by those creating and holding these spaces.

1 Invest in the Person

Leadership development is often reduced to skills, outputs, or short-term results. Fellows, however, spoke about the importance of being seen as whole people, each carrying vision, pressure, lived experience, vulnerability, and responsibility. At the same time, no two Fellows are the same; they bring different experiences, perspectives, needs, and ways of learning.

The tailored one-to-one support and the range of spaces created throughout the programme allowed Fellows to engage in ways that felt meaningful and sustainable for them. This made it possible to explore different ways of understanding and practising leadership.

Programmes that focus only on output risk overlooking what sustains the work over time. Investing in the person strengthens resilience, and in a field as demanding as ending childhood violence, that resilience is essential.

> I have never imagined myself going in the direction of leadership. Now, through the impact fund, I am developing my ideas and doing things in practice, and it gives me confidence. I feel my perspective is valid and my ideas matter. Initially, I felt very uncomfortable that we were receiving this funding for ourselves. Now I realise that everyone deserves to be invested in to make the most of what we receive and to give back to everyone. This is a very trust-based approach, and it's rare. It helps me be a better person, rather than being scrutinised.
>
> - Myriam Hunfeld, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

> Truly trust and invest in young leaders beyond surface-level participation. Create spaces where they feel safe to be authentic, share their lived experiences, and even show vulnerability without fear of judgment. Young leaders in the child rights space don ’t just need skills, they need trust, meaningful ownership, and environments that nurture both their leadership and their wellbeing.
>
> - Namawejje Hajarah, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Recommendations:

- Create safe and diverse spaces for authentic reflection and learning
- Recognise that healing, growth, and leadership are inseparable
- Keep in mind that impact and change unfold over time

2 Make Trust Tangible

Trust is often named as a value, yet it is rarely built into how programmes actually operate. Fellows described experiencing meaningful trust when they had space to exercise their agency and make decisions without unnecessary structure or oversight. This changed how they showed up—with greater ownership, creativity, and commitment.

> In the child rights space, it is especially important to trust young leaders with real responsibility, provide flexible funding, and nurture strong communities of practice. When young leaders feel seen, supported, and trusted, they are more innovative, committed, and able to drive meaningful change in their communities.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Recommendations:

- Provide flexible funding that allows for experimentation
- Avoid competitive or restrictive structures

- Model and encourage open sharing and exchange of resources and skills through collective toolkits and communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups) to transparently disseminate opportunities
- Trust young leaders to make decisions about their own work and growth

3 Centre Lived Experience as Knowledge

Fellows and Learning Partners across both cohorts were clear: lived experience and survivors ' voices must be centred. This is particularly critical in the child rights field, where many young leaders are directly connected to the issues they are working to address. Their insights are not supplementary. They are essential to understanding the realities of harm, the gaps in existing systems, and the possibilities for change.

> Centre lived experiences, especially of those closest to the challenges, and remain flexible in how support is provided. Real impact happens when leaders are trusted, resourced, and empowered to lead in ways that reflect their unique contexts.
>
> - Anonymous, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

Recommendations:

- Treat lived experience as a form of expertise
- Challenge assumptions and remain open to being wrong
- Design programmes that are shaped by those closest to the challenges
- Ensure young leaders are co-creators rather than passive participants. Co-creation can include shaping priorities, designing sessions, participating in grantmaking, and contributing to selection processes
- Use narrative and storytelling exercises to encourage creativity, reflection, and deeper understanding

4 Prioritise Community, Rather Than Just Individual Development

Relationships, peer learning, shared reflection, and ongoing support should play a central role in any investment strategy. The Sprout community created confidence, accountability, and continuity that extended well beyond the programme itself.

> Sprout gave me something deeply personal: connection. It gave me friends, people I can reach out to when I ’m not at my best, and a support system that I know will continue long after the programme. These are relationships I believe will grow with me for years to come.
>
> I also learnt that there is real power in numbers. When we come together as young leaders with shared values, our impact becomes stronger, more visible, and more sustainable.
>
> - Kenneth Usoro, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

> Scale it up. I think this kind of programme is needed now more than ever. The world is becoming increasingly divided by political and economic tensions, and people themselves are often becoming more divided in their beliefs and their ways of seeing problems. Every opportunity to connect, to listen, and to share values becomes extremely important. Programmes like Sprout [are] a meaningful response to the fragmentation of the world today.
>
> - Veronika Odinokova, Learning Partner 2025-2026



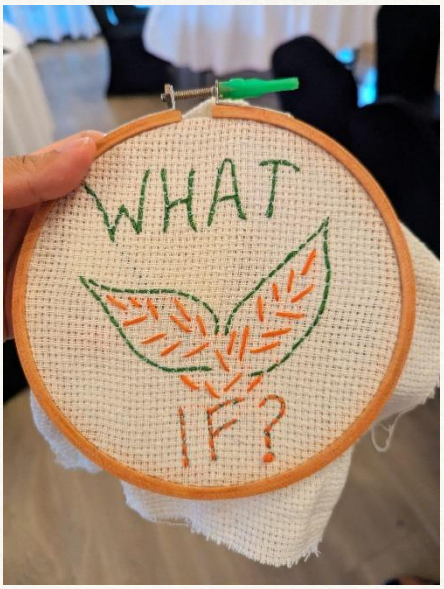
Recommendations:

- Invest in peer connection and sustained relationships
- Leverage collective wisdom and shared learning through skills exchanges, rather than focusing only on individual progression or competition
- Build with ecosystems and communities in mind
- Encourage collaboration and shared action into the future

5 Allow for Emergence and the Unknown

Leadership takes shape in different ways depending on context. Flexible, open, and adaptive spaces allow this to happen. In contrast, rigid structures can limit what is possible.

When programmes create room for emergence, they also shift traditional dynamics. It softens hierarchy between programme staff and Fellows, creating a more equal environment where not all answers are predefined, and where possibilities can be explored together. This invites conversation, debate, and questioning, rather than relying on fixed responses that may not reflect the realities participants are navigating.



This flexibility removes the pressure to arrive fully formed, creating space to be honest about challenges and to explore solutions that make sense in one ’s own context, rather than focusing on expectations or deliverables. It also reinforces that learning happens through practice. Mistakes, adjustments, and experimentation become part of the process rather than something to avoid.

> Through replicating a similar retreat with my colleagues, I wanted them to feel what I feel as a Sprout Fellow. I wanted them to learn the importance of partnership and collaboration by understanding that there is no right or wrong answer, then eventually we were all present in the discussion.
>
> - Destiny Asuelimen, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

> Initially I did lots of work by myself and put everything on my shoulders, but after Sprout, I learnt to delegate more. It's so inspiring to see the different potential of other team members.
>
> - Welisane Maagbor Bonè, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

Recommendations:

- Leave dedicated space for emergence
- Allow participants to shape how they engage and what they pursue, recognising that we do not need to know all the answers
- Value the process — exploring, debating, experimenting, and reflecting — not only the outcomes

6 Work at the Pace of Transformation

Slowing down is a necessary condition for meaningful leadership, and for trust and relationships to grow. In fast-paced environments, the pressure to produce immediate outcomes can limit reflection, learning, and long-term impact.

> One of my biggest learnings is that leadership development cannot be rushed or forced into rigid timelines. Growth happens in layers—through experiences, conversations, and moments of reflection that are often not immediately visible. I ' ve also learnt the importance of designing a leadership journey that is intentional and personal. There is no single pathway that works for everyone, and programmes that allow for this flexibility create more meaningful outcomes.
>
> - Olamilekan Olajubu, Sprout Fellow 2025-2026

Recommendations:

- Build in time and resources for reflection and adaptation
- Recognise that growth and transformation take time to emerge and become visible, and accept that sometimes they will not be visible at all
- Treat regenerative practices, rest, and pause as core leadership practices. Caring for oneself is not a diversion from purpose; it is what makes living the purpose possible.
- Centre sustainability and long-term community-building



Regenerative space surrounded by lush greenery at Maanzoni Lodge, Kenya, 2025.

7 Modelling Care in Practice

Care was at the heart of how the Sprout experience was designed. It was intentionally resourced and practised, not treated as an add-on or an afterthought.

Supporting young leaders in this field requires attention to the full range of what they carry: physically, emotionally, and in relation to their environments, their work, and their lived experience. Fellows highlighted the importance of spaces where these needs were anticipated and responded to as part of the programme itself. This meant creating conditions where people could show up fully, and where support was available when it was needed.



A dedicated wellbeing corner during the retreat in Kenya, 2025.

Recommendations:

- Provide access to wellbeing and mental health support, such as having a therapist available during the retreat
- Make space for flexibility to respond to personal circumstances, including parenting responsibilities, time zone differences, health conditions, or other unexpected needs
- Allocate dedicated resources to reduce barriers to participation, such as internet/data support or emergency funds
- Build safeguarding and risk assessment into programme design

> Before Sprout, I did not fully see safeguarding as something that had to sit at the centre of movement building and organisational leadership. I saw it more as an added policy requirement than as a living practice. Through Sprout, I began to understand that safeguarding is not optional; it is foundational. It shapes how we engage children, survivors, staff, volunteers, and communities. It influences trust, accountability, and the integrity of the work itself. That shift now shows clearly in my organisation, where safeguarding is no longer an afterthought but part of how we design programmes, hold meetings, manage teams, and think about protection overall
>
> - Raphael Oyeniyi, Sprout Fellow 2024-2025

V. Final Reflections

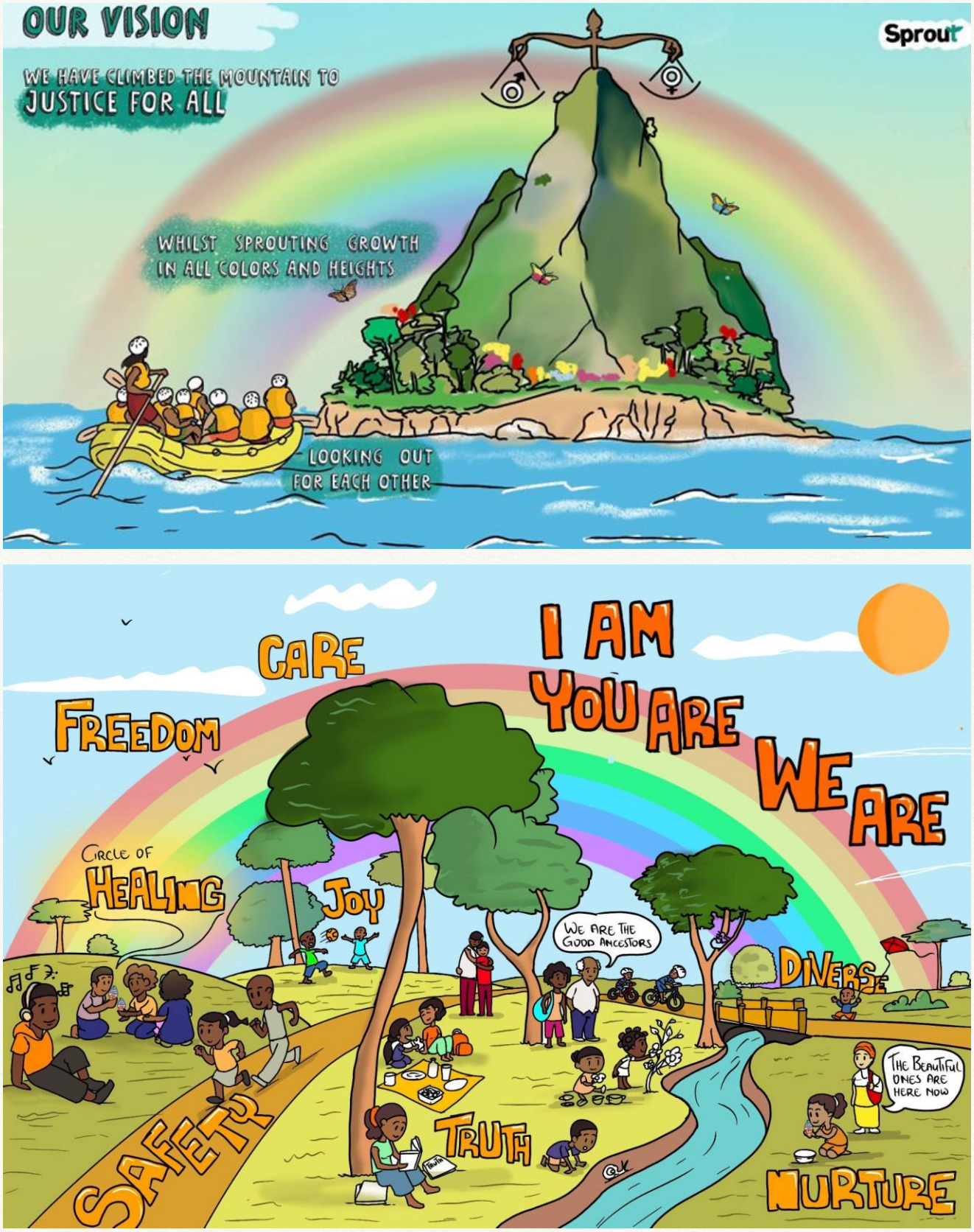
Sprout is a testament to the fact that young leaders are not waiting to lead. They already are—in their communities, in their work, and in the ways they navigate systems every day. What shapes their impact is the conditions they work in — whether they are trusted with responsibility, supported as whole people, and given space to reflect, connect, and experiment.

When those conditions are present, leadership becomes more sustainable and more responsive to complex problems. By moving beyond a narrow focus on individual success and beginning to recognise change across relationships, generations, and systems, we acknowledge the multi-layered nature of the leadership required to build the future we seek.

In troubled times, the path to that future may seem less certain than ever. “The world is on fire” is an understatement when the structures that have shaped global order for decades are shifting or breaking down. Imperfect as they were, such geopolitical, economic, international development, and other international norms and practices are giving way to spiralling uncertainty, exploitation, and injustice.

In this moment, sadly, the child rights field holds negligible power. And, in this new reality, standard leadership will not take us where we need to go.

And yet, it is precisely in this context that a different kind of leadership creates new possibilities. Ending childhood violence is not only a matter of scaling programmes or strengthening policy; it requires leadership that can work across systems, centre lived experience, and build trust in environments shaped by complexity and uncertainty. The kind of leadership emerging through Sprout opens up new ways of working—not from the margins, but from within the system itself.



'Collective vision' co-created by Sprout Fellows from both cohorts during the retreat in 2024 and 2025.

We believe that the path to the future we seek can only emerge through this entirely different conception of leadership, the type of leadership that the Sprout Fellows ' experience demonstrates.

This is especially critical now. As systems fragment and traditional pathways to influence become less reliable, the ability to navigate and connect across boundaries becomes essential. This kind of leadership is undoubtedly ambitious. But for a field seeking to end childhood violence, it is also necessary.

And it demands something critical from the child rights field: above all else, invest in the people who carry the solutions and in the conditions that will make them thrive. Because when nurtured with care, leaders can grow in transformative ways, and these leaders will be the ones to imagine and forge a new path toward the future we all seek. It is our responsibility to trust the next generation leaders. That is the work ahead, and it is work we must carry forward together.

VI. Acknowledgements

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