

SPARK

play · connect · belong

"Play your way closer"

Intergenerational Digital Co-Design for Older Adults



PERSONA



Margaret

72 · Retired teacher · Boston, MA

PROFILE

Lives with **Husband, neighbor nearby**
Tech owned **iPhone (gift from daughter)**
Uses daily **Phone calls, basic texts**

GOALS

Send message to family FaceTime grandkids

Connect with family

Don't know which button to click Forgets steps next day

Hates feeling like a burden

"I don't want to keep asking Emma to show me again. She's busy and I can see it on her face."

SPARK ROLE

She arrives with a goal, not a question. The session is built around what she defines. She is never the student in the room. She leaves knowing she's allowed to ask.

TECH NEWCOMER



Emma

19 · College sophomore · Boston, MA

PROFILE

Studies **Communication, Northeastern**
Tech fluency **High — iPhone, social media, apps**
Visits grandma **Monthly, more on holidays**

GOALS

Stay connected with grandma Help without being condescending

Make visits into a shared ritual

FRUSTRATIONS

Doesn't know how to teach patiently Grandma shuts down quickly

Feels guilty when too busy

"I show her three times and she still can't do it. I don't know if I'm just bad at explaining."

SPARK ROLE

She's handed a structure, not a blank slate. Her job is to make Margaret's goal happen without taking over — she follows the card, not her instinct to fix things faster.

TECH GUIDE



David

34 · Program Coordinator · Boston Senior Center

PROFILE

Runs weekly **Senior programs, drop-in events**
Background **Social work, no tech training**
Manages **3–5 volunteer-led sessions/week**

GOALS

Run sessions without being the expert

Give participants structure that works

See people leave with something real

FRUSTRATIONS

Materials that assume too much Younger participant takes over

Sessions feel like classes

"I'm not here to teach anyone anything. I just need a structure that works even when I don't know what I'm doing."

SPARK ROLE

He holds the container — sets the tone, hands out the cards, then steps back. His success is invisibility: if Margaret and Emma leave talking to each other, it worked.

PROGRAM HOST

SPARK: Margaret's Hero's Journey



Deficiency

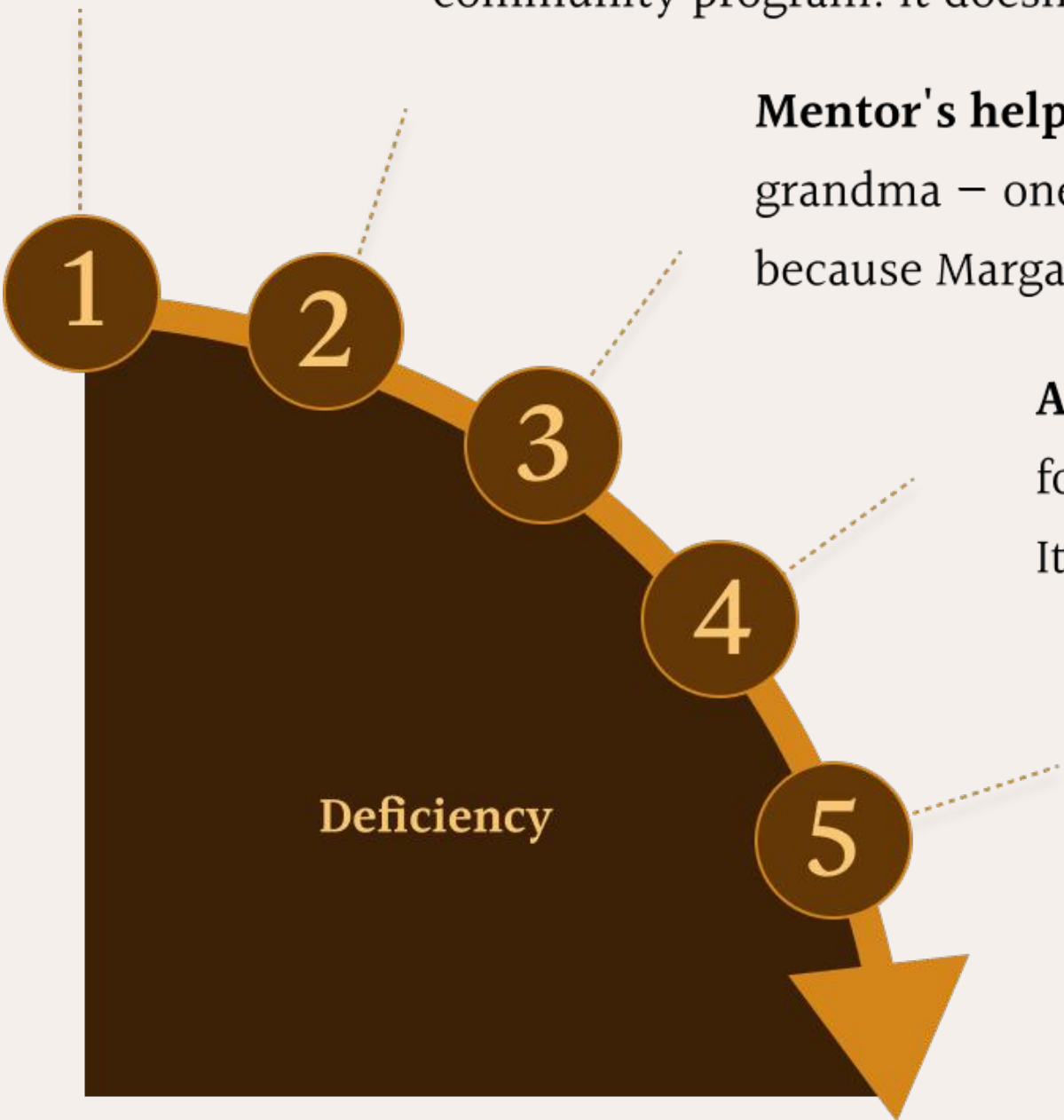
Hidden problem – Margaret doesn't feel excluded from technology. She feels excluded from the moments that happen around it. Her family sends memes she doesn't understand, plans trips in group chats she can't follow, and laughs at references she can't place. She wants to be in those conversations – not a simplified version of them, not a watered-down "grandma edition" – but the real ones. She just doesn't know how to get there without asking for help in a way that makes her feel like a burden, or worse, like she's the reason the room slows down.

Call to action – Something in their world signals that connection is possible – a flyer, a family moment, a community program. It doesn't ask them to learn anything. It asks what they want.

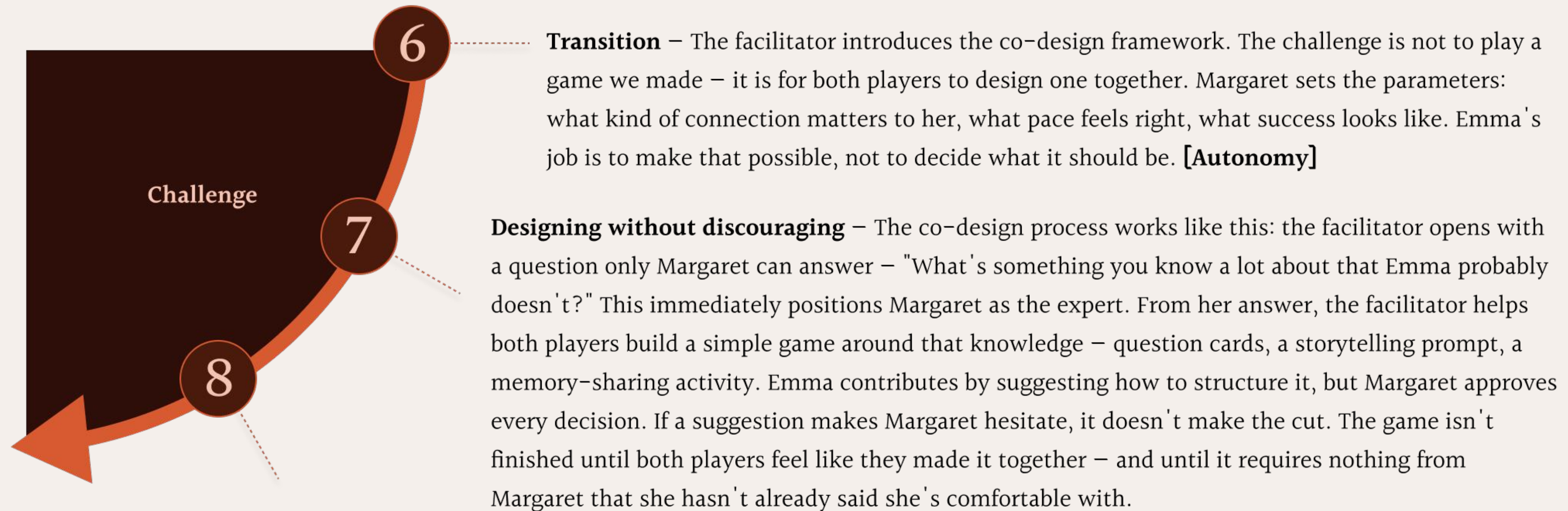
Mentor's help – Emma isn't looking for a student. She's looking for a better way to spend time with her grandma – one where they're both having fun and neither of them is performing. She finds SPARK not because Margaret needs fixing, but because Emma wants the visit to mean something more.

Accepting the problem – They both recognize that their current dynamic – Emma showing, Margaret forgetting, both feeling guilty – isn't what either of them wants. The problem isn't Margaret's ability. It's that they've never had a shared activity that put them on equal footing.

Decision to act – They show up together. Not because one is teaching the other, but because they both want something better. That's the only agreement needed to begin.



Challenge



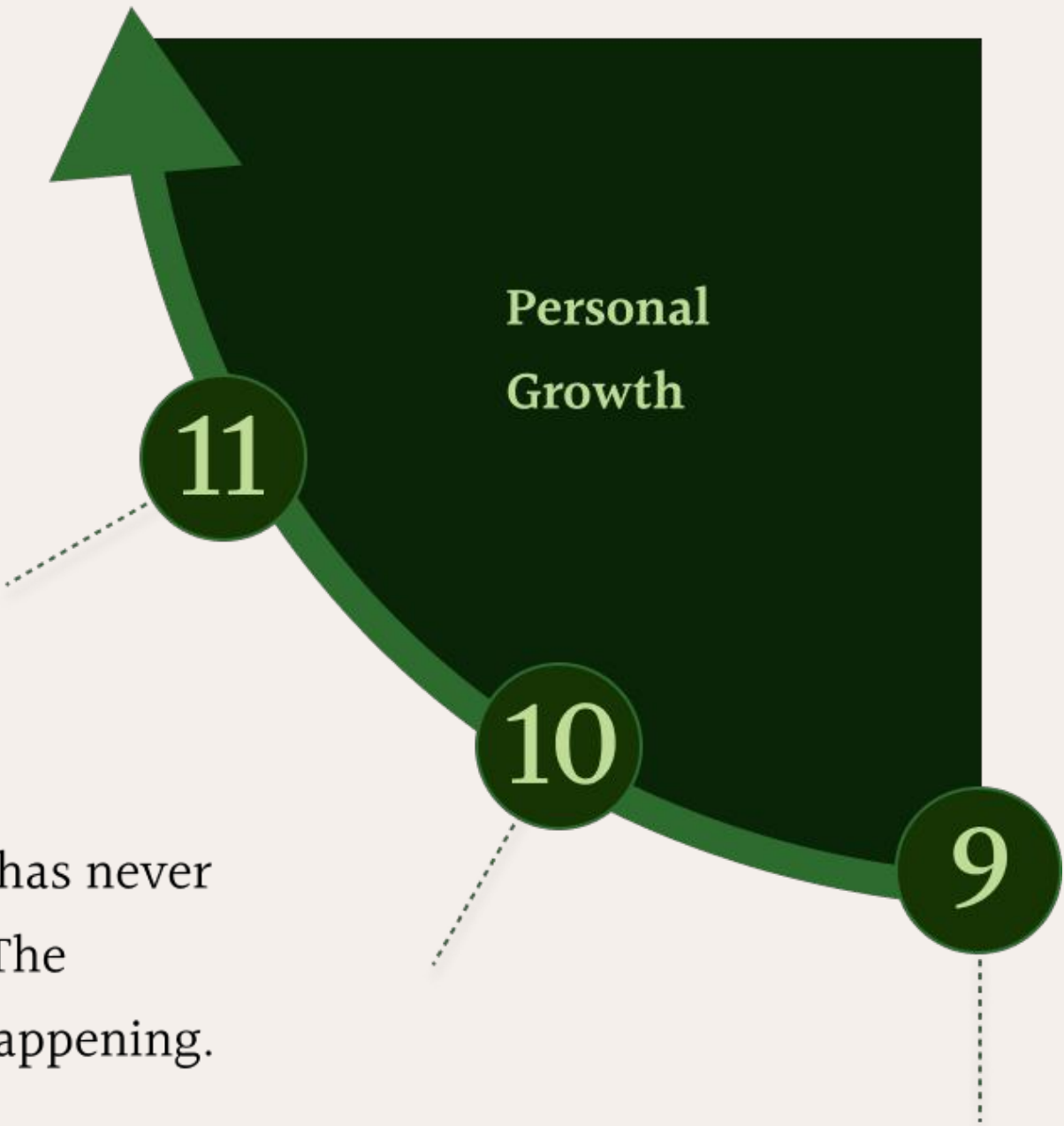
Setting the parameters – The players don't need to know what the final game will look like before they start – they just need to agree on what it must feel like. It should be meaningful to Margaret. It should require genuine participation from both. It should never put either player in a position where they feel useless or left behind. When both players can say yes to all three, the game is ready to play.

Personal Growth

Identity definition – Margaret leaves not as someone who was helped, but as someone who designed something. Emma leaves having followed her grandmother's lead and discovered that it was more fun that way. **[Merit]**

Emotional reward – Margaret wins a round, or tells a story Emma has never heard, or teaches Emma something Emma genuinely didn't know. The dynamic that Emma wanted – equal footing, real connection – is happening. Neither of them is performing.

Key task accomplished – They play the game they built together. Margaret isn't learning something foreign – she's playing something she helped create. Because of that, she's never lost. She knows the rules because she made them.



Community Resolution

Stability – community leader – Problem solving was personal – Margaret sharing her experience one conversation at a time with people she loves. Stability is when that ripples outward without her having to push it. Her neighbor hears about it and asks how to sign up. Her church group starts asking if SPARK can come to them. Margaret isn't teaching anyone – she's simply living proof that the system works, and people around her can see it. **[Human rights]**

Problem solving – Margaret calls her daughter and tells her about the afternoon. She's animated in a way her daughter hasn't heard in a while. She describes the game, what she contributed, how Emma didn't know half the answers. She asks if her daughter wants to try it with her grandkids. She's not passing on a lesson – she's sharing something she's proud of.

Returning home – The week after, Emma texts just to say hi. Margaret texts back – and then asks when they can play again. She initiated. That's new. **[Interpersonal care]**

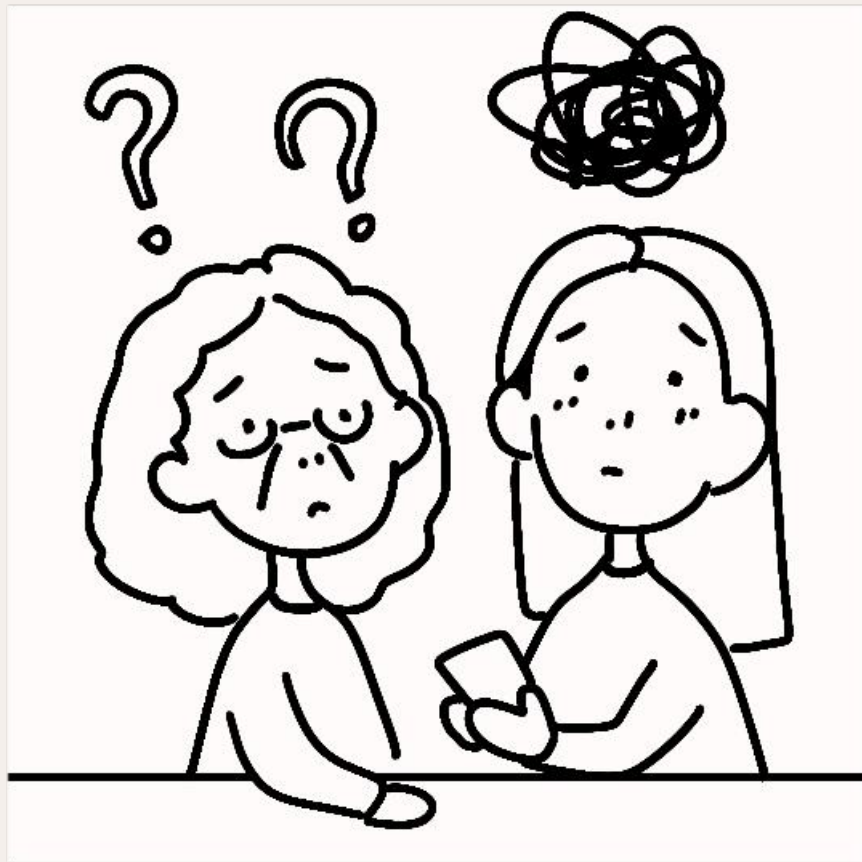
Identity definition – They leave with the game they made. It lives on the fridge, in a card deck, in a shared memory. It belongs to both of them and they can play it again anytime – no facilitator needed.



STORYBOARD



Margaret at the dinner table while her family laughs at a meme on their phones. She's smiling but slightly outside the circle. Emma glances over and feels the gap too.



Emma sitting across from Margaret after a frustrating tutorial attempt. Margaret looks embarrassed. Emma looks helpless. Neither is having fun and both know it.



Margaret at the dinner table while her family laughs at a meme on their phones. She's smiling but slightly outside the circle. Emma glances over and feels the gap too.



David greets them at the door of the workshop.



He hands Margaret a card that says "Elder Expert." She raises an eyebrow. He smiles and steps back.

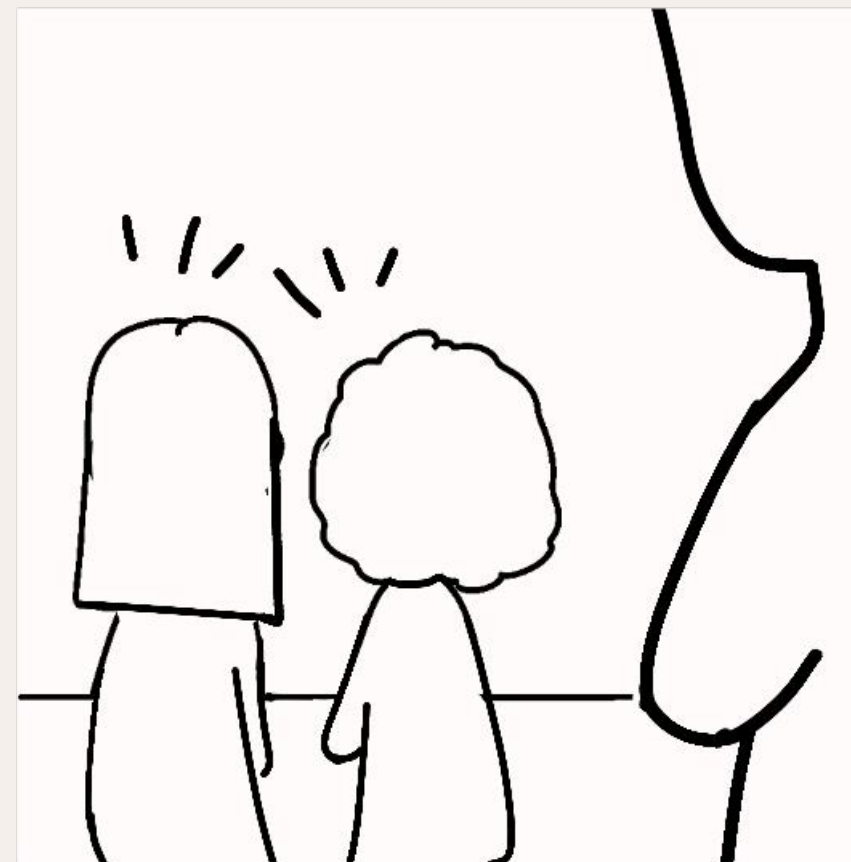
STORYBOARD



David asks Margaret "What's something you know a lot about that Emma probably doesn't?"



Margaret and Emma building the game together. Margaret is pointing at something. Emma is writing it down.



David is visible in the background, arms folded, watching quietly — not intervening.

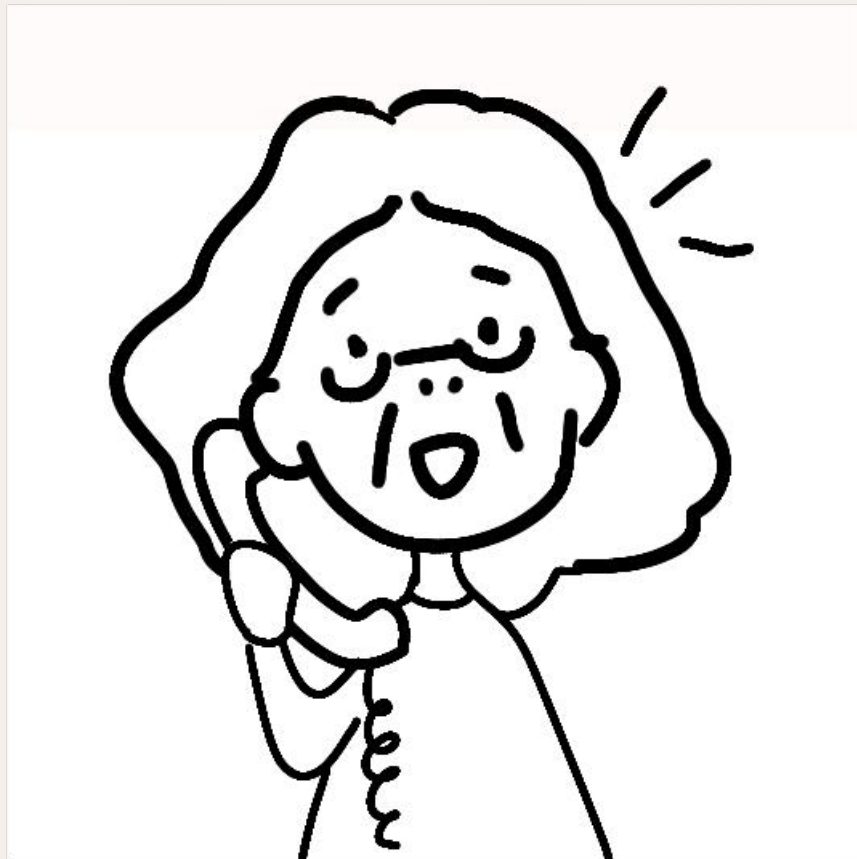


They're playing. Margaret wins a round and laughs. Emma looks genuinely surprised.



Margaret puts the cheat sheet on the fridge. It's in her own handwriting. David is gone. The system is no longer needed for this moment to exist.

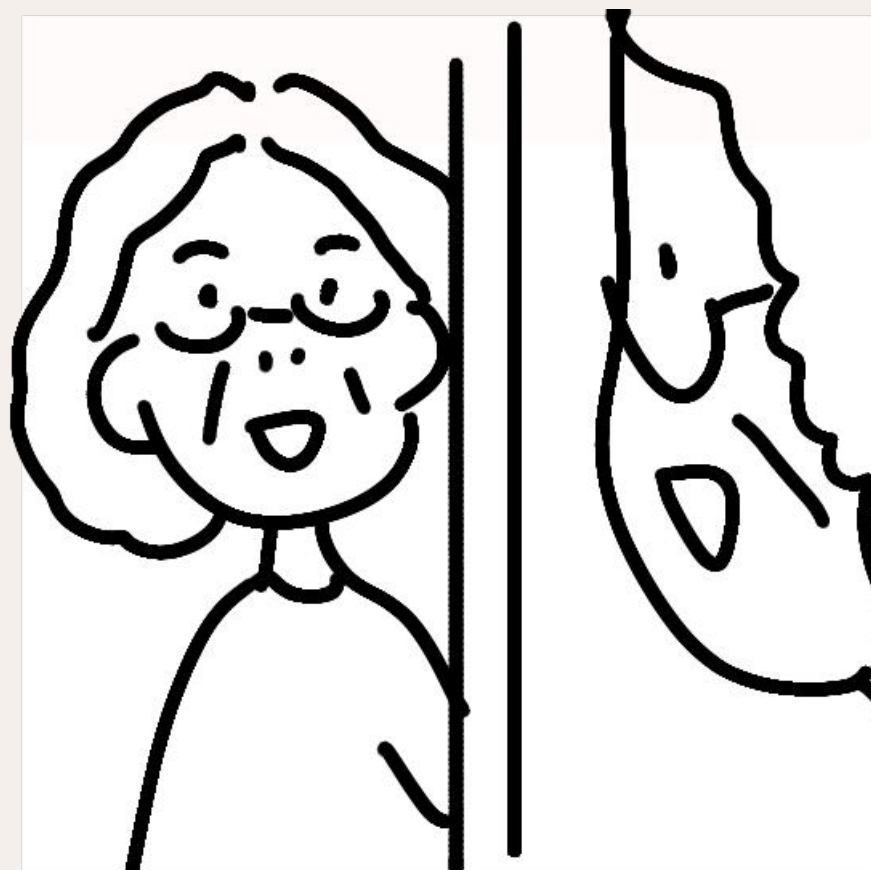
STORYBOARD



Margaret on the phone with her daughter, animated and proud, describing the afternoon.



Emma's name comes up. So does the game they made.



Margaret's neighbor knocks on her door asking about SPARK. Margaret answers with the confidence of someone who has something worth sharing.

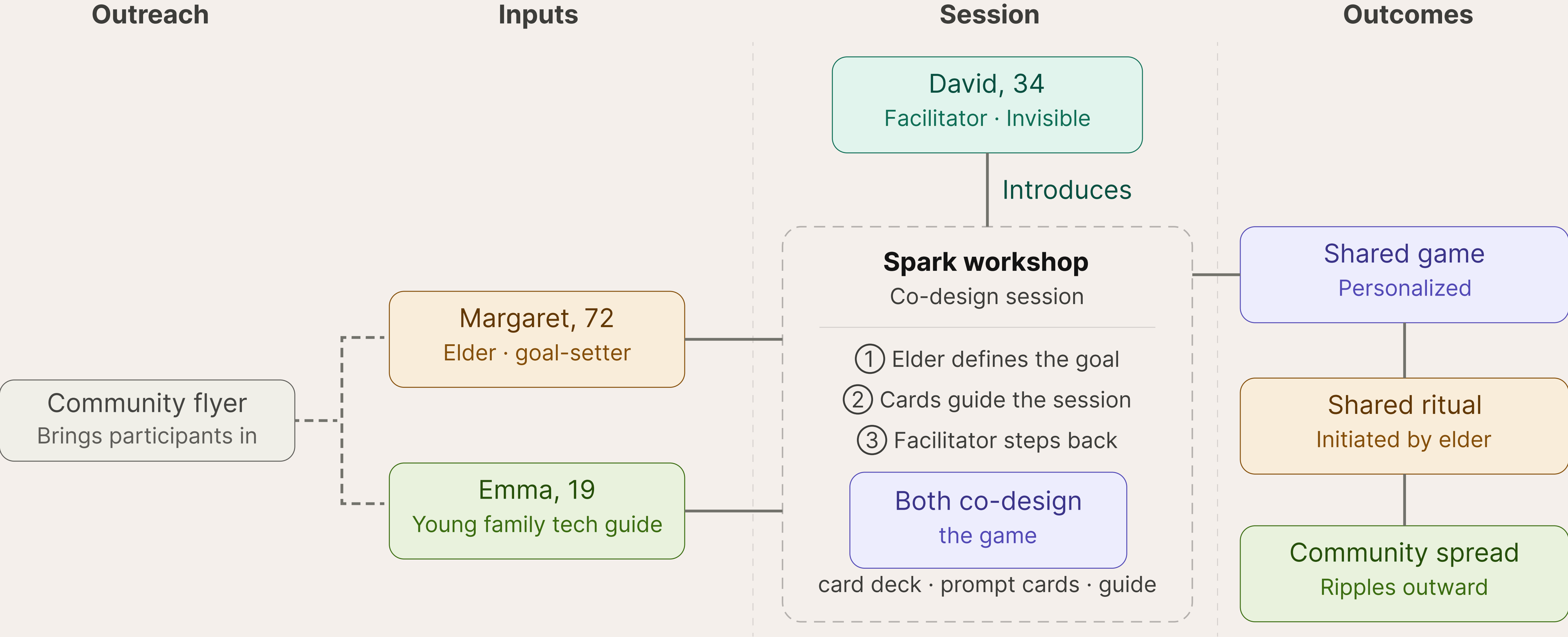


More and more families are starting to use Spark.



Spark! Bring Someone You Love!

SYSTEM MAP



Thank You!

play · connect · belong

Spark!: "Play your way closer"

Intergenerational Digital Co-Design for Older Adults

