

INSIGHTS FOR
A BETTER
WAY

IMPROVING SERVICES AND
BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Edited by Caroline Slocock

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A Better Way is a growing network of social change activists, from the voluntary sector and beyond, who share a common vision about better services and stronger communities and are exchanging ideas, knowledge and experiences to help make this happen. It is hosted by the think tank Civil Exchange, and is co-ordinated by Steve Wyler and Caroline Slocock. We work in partnership with the Carnegie UK Trust, with the support of the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.



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THIS COLLECTION IS DEDICATED
TO THE LATE JANE SLOWEY

A founder member of a Better Way,
whose Advantaged Thinking inspired us all

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO THESE INSIGHTS TELL US ABOUT A BETTER WAY?



AN INTRODUCTION BY CAROLINE SLOCOCK

Communities could be so much stronger, services so much better and this collection of insights lights the way. Individually, the contributions flesh out our Better Way propositions. Collectively, they develop the four themes identified at last year's national Gathering and take us a further step toward our ultimate 'call to action'.

First, we've started to demonstrate **the value of stories that move hearts as well as minds**, bringing the propositions alive and giving 'ideas friends'.

'Personal stories give ideas friends'

Julia Unwin and David Robinson write movingly about the deep value of kindness and humanity in public services in moments of personal crisis. Alicia Moore's poem captures

how the education system is failing to recognise individuality and is causing stress. Clare Wightman and Steve Wyler demonstrate vividly that people in the community can sometimes provide better support than public services. Mark Johnson tells how he's challenged the deep-seated bias against experts in lived experience in the criminal justice system and built a movement. Liz Richardson takes the potentially dry subject of how top down measures impede learning and makes it fun. Mark Gamsu's story brings home that targets fail to do justice to the impact on people's lives.

The personal brings a fresh perspective. It is often hard to demonstrate that prevention is better than cure, but in our own lives it's much easier to see, Jenny Brotchie finds. Sarah Hughes takes the recipe

for prevention in her professional world and applies it at home – and it works. Kate Welch looks reflectively at herself and shows why it's important to make space for others to have their say. Listen to your heart, not the head, Kathy Evans explains, if you want to follow a Better Way.

These are positive stories that point to a Better Way, but in our discussions we've also recognised the need to influence the stories told by others – will a story that finally emerges from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower be one which not only holds people to account but which also leads to genuine change?

Second, these essays tell us what we mean by **'shared leadership'**.

A powerful case is made for what we call 'collaboration, not competition'. Complex social issues are often caused by complex systems. Co-ordinated action not only better addresses structural causes, it also matches the complexity of individual lives, says Toby Lowe, arguing for commissioning and funding to support this. Cate Newnes-Smith would like to see more 'holistic systems leaders' who understand the real issues in people's lives and work across organisations and sectors to deliver shared

goals. 'Social connectors' can also empower and link up individuals, as Audrey Thompson's own experience illustrates. Big companies are increasingly reaching out and working innovatively with charities toward shared goals, says Tom Levitt, with compelling case studies.

'Practise radical listening'

'Changing ourselves is better than seeking change in others,' we say. 'Be the change you want to see in the world' writes Sue Tibballs, asking people to make more use of the immense latent 'social power' of civil society. True leadership means influencing and empowering others to make change happen; and we should create organisations 'without walls', we've concluded in Better Way discussions. Keep our organisations 'personal', reminds Karin Woodley, and practise 'radical listening': communities should be seen as partners, not consumers. Chris Wright tells us how Catch22 is developing new models of practice to help put Better Way propositions into action, and create momentum to shift wider public sector practice – modelling organisational leadership.

Let's create a network of 'curious' people who seek to understand how to change systems, some members

have said. Matt Kepple challenges us to create our own version of Wikipedia so that we can share what works and become a collective force for good.

Third, **the rich potential of communities, people and organisations** is brought home here.

'Every person matters and brings their strengths to the table'

Colin Falconer – in memory of Jane Slowey – explains how the Foyer Federation established Advantaged Thinking to 'build on strengths' and avoid 'the branding of disadvantage'. A food co-op in Gateshead, started as an alternative to a food bank, creates a community 'where every person matters and brings their own strengths and qualities to the table,' Ollie Batchelor says. At Groundswell, Steven Platt shows how the 'Give a lot, Get a lot' ethos works.

So Jung Rim tells how the Social Innovation Exchange creates platforms for diverse voices – an example of 'mass participation'. 'Bringing people together unleashes creativity, opportunity and energy people create themselves,' writes Sona Mahtani about the Selby Centre in Tottenham, another example. Simon Shaw explains how Food Power is creating opportunities

for people experiencing food poverty to set the agenda.

How to support the 'local' is also explored here. Richard Bridge argues that local authorities need to distribute power more equally. We should be 'spreading rather than scaling up', we've concluded in Better Way discussions. National organisations should no longer compete with local ones, Polly Neate advocates. Nicola Butler illustrates the value of genuine local and national partnership working – local is often best for services and communities but both are needed.

Finally, there's ideas and experience in this volume for **putting the Better Way propositions into practice, avoiding lip-service.**

In addition to the insights already mentioned, Richard Wilson explains that good relationships are key to 'Good' and 'Bad Help'; and David Robinson gives us principles for developing a 'warm web' in communities – putting 'relationships, rather than transactions' into practice.

Rick Henderson identifies that treating homeless people as people is the key to 'prevention rather than cure'. Caroline Slocock says we should recognise and strengthen the preventative role of social

infrastructure. A New Direction is helping young people to realise their cultural capital and escape increasingly restricted and unhealthy lives, Laurence Walker explains.

On 'principles rather than targets', high-stakes accountability is distorting practice and undermining learning, writes Bethia McNeil. Matt Leach shows that the Local Trust has been able to 'let go', entrusting local communities to establish their own goals. Local Cornerstone is 'throwing away the rulebook' and empowering front-line staff, says Edel Harris.

Graeme Duncan identifies principles that are more likely to lead to better education than damaging high-stakes targets.

They are showing 'it can be done' and point to how to do it. As Steve Wyler, reflecting on the Better Way network, quotes optimistically: 'never doubt that a group of committed individuals can change the world.'

Caroline Slocock is the co-convenor of a Better Way.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

We all need help throughout our lives, and benefit from 'right first time' support, sometimes at early stages, sometimes at moments of crisis or difficulty. We also need strong communities that build readiness, resilience and resourcefulness, and national systems and policies which help people to thrive, not undermine them.

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AT HOME



A PERSONAL STORY BY SARAH HUGHES

What does it mean, not just to talk about prevention professionally, but also to put it into practice in one's own life?

Children's mental health is in the news and making sure our children stay mentally well and resilient has become one of the biggest challenges for society as a whole. My organisation believes that a whole system approach is the only way forward and that blaming social media or schools isn't going to get to the heart of the problem. We know that one in ten children and young people will have a diagnosable mental health problem, and that most adult mental illness can be traced right back to early years.

I have worked in mental health for twenty-eight years and if I'm honest, as a parent this worries me. I know a lot about the risks and what makes a child vulnerable and both of my children could meet that criteria. My first child has a rare disease called MCADD and my second

child's early years were blighted by a family locked in a cycle of grief after a succession of deaths in the family including my father. We also have a history of mental illness in our family. Some might suggest all this could be a recipe for disaster and on paper I can see that. So what do we do? We don't just wait to see what happens, we as a family spend our time together creating the conditions for resilience and wellbeing to thrive.

'Developing emotional literacy and help-seeking behaviours and investing in emotional and social capital'

I am aware that I am hyper vigilant, my experience largely confined to trying to find solutions for people when things have become too difficult. We know that for many of the people we see in services trauma and inequality are at the heart of their distress. The impact of illness is great, lives are lost and families fractured. Mental health leaders have turned their attention to prevention, population health, finding ways to

develop the emotional literacy of the nation. The vision is to prevent psychological decline, develop help-seeking behaviours so that people can get the help they need when they need it, and importantly creating communities that give space to and invest in emotional and social capital. It makes sense.

My children will inevitably face challenges that will destabilise their well-being. I have resisted the urge to home school them and protect them from external influence: we realised that they wouldn't thank us for it in the long run. Instead we create the conditions for emotional, social and political experience. We talk about our feelings, we recognise their distress signals and they know that there are good and bad things about life and that there are people in activist spaces creating the path for a better future, challenging inequality and discrimination, and they know that they benefit from this.

'The five ways to wellbeing'

Put simply, most parents are already persuaded in the healthy 'five a day' fruit and vegetable mantra, but not so much it seems are we so familiar with the five ways to wellbeing. Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Learn and Give are the five areas experts have linked to happy lives. They make sense to me because they recognise the individual and their relationship with their environment. I can't be sure that trying to parent or live in this way will prevent mental illness but I hope that it gives my children the best chances of staying well.

Sarah Hughes is CEO of the [Centre for Mental Health](#) and has worked in mental health for twenty-eight years within the voluntary sector, including leading a number of local Mind organisations. Sarah is undertaking a professional doctorate with the Tavistock and Portman Centre studying Women, Resilience and Leadership.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR GOOD LIVES



A PERSONAL STORY BY JENNY BROTCHE

Can you share a story about prevention? I've been working on the Carnegie UK Trust's Enabling State programme since 2012 (give or take some maternity leave). My bread and butter is looking at how governments and others can deliver more joined up, participative and preventative services. I must have come across countless inspiring, robust examples of prevention in action. So this should have been easy and yet... I'm struggling.

And this is the thing about prevention. If it works we probably don't know about it.

Last year I carried out some in-depth qualitative research with a small number of housing association tenants, many of whom had had traumatic or difficult past experiences as well as mental and physical ill health. Could I identify what preventative measures could have made life easier for our participants? But there was no good story. The nice linear kind that goes: if public

services had intervened more effectively at point X outcomes for X would have been better by X.

I tried another tack. Maybe it was hard to pinpoint preventative measures that have or could have made a difference to other people. What if I turned the question on myself – could I be more certain? I found this easier and quickly came up with two examples.

I have had Type 1 diabetes for almost twenty-five years. Nine years ago I received an insulin pump to replace daily injections. Insulin pumps are a large upfront cost to the NHS but they are thought to offer a long-term saving thanks to the reduced risk of diabetic complications later in life. I'm confident that I would not have been able to have two complication-free pregnancies without the technology.

The other is a breastfeeding support group that I attended as a first time mum. The group was run by a

midwife who offered her professional expertise but it was largely a peer support group. The objective was presumably to improve rates of breastfeeding in the first six months after birth (preventative in itself) but for me as an anxious, sleep-deprived first time mother it offered so much more. It was a free, non-judgemental place with (hot) coffee and chocolate biscuits where I could meet other anxious, sleep-deprived mothers. We shared our war stories, offered advice and a friendly ear and the midwives provided reassurance on a whole range of small baby related issues. There were often tears, but my spirits were always lifted when I left and I still have a strong support network of fellow mothers whom I met there. I don't doubt that the group had a profound impact on mental health outcomes for many of the mothers that attended it although I have no idea whether this was on the radar of the organisers.

In a squeezed health service insulin pumps will, I hope, continue to be funded. There is, I think, enough compelling short-term evidence from Randomised Control Trials that it's an effective therapy.

The future of the breastfeeding support group is however less clear. Discussions about discontinuing it were on-going three years ago when

I attended. I can imagine that it could easily have been cut and that I would not have read about it my local paper. Yet the impact of the group was, for me, just as important, just harder to measure and quantify.

'Downstream prevention is diffuse and messy and often not very 'sexy''

And this is the other thing about prevention, particularly upstream prevention (very early action). It's diffuse and messy and often not very 'sexy'. The negative outcomes that we seek to avoid through prevention are complex, influenced and shaped by many, interdependent, contributing factors.

Interventions do not lead to certain or consistent outcomes. Upstream preventative measures are often not headline hitting interventions but quieter, more low, key activities, like breast feeding support groups that help build the foundations, choices and support networks for good lives.

Jenny Brochie is a Policy Officer at the Carnegie UK Trust and worked with environmental NGOs before joining the Trust. She is passionate about improving lives in a holistic, pragmatic and evidence based way. At the Carnegie UK Trust, she focuses on the shift from Welfare to [Enabling State](#) and [evidence](#).

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS MEANS TREATING PEOPLE AS PEOPLE FIRST



IDEAS FROM RICK HENDERSON

To a large extent homelessness is the ultimate tragic consequence of society's failure to truly embrace the prevention agenda. Every person sleeping rough on the streets of Britain has been both failed by the system and then blamed and pilloried for that failure. Every story of homelessness is a story of missed opportunities, social disconnection and unresolved trauma. In almost every case, early intervention could have made a significant impact and possibly avoided a person becoming homeless in the first place.

'There is no shortage of evidence, both statistical and anecdotal, about what works to prevent and end homelessness'

By every available measure homelessness in all its forms has increased year on year since 2010. This is despite the fact that in living memory homelessness was in steep decline, with rough sleeping numbers as low as 500 (it is closer to 5000 at present). There is no

shortage of evidence, both statistical and anecdotal, about what works to prevent and end homelessness. Stable, affordable accommodation; good quality advice and support; strong social networks; and access to appropriate mental health and substance misuse services all help to prevent and tackle homelessness.

One of the biggest causes of contemporary homelessness is the ending of assured shorthold tenancies. In simple terms this means private landlords evicting people at short notice even when they have nowhere else to go. Research shows that landlords are reluctant to rent to people on welfare benefits – especially young people. This forces people either onto the streets or into often unsuitable and costly temporary accommodation. Once people become homeless there is a real risk that without timely interventions either by the State or charities, people find themselves in a cycle of homelessness and rough sleeping that can lead to entrenchment.

Thankfully this situation may be about to change with the introduction of the new Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 which increases entitlement to help with housing. However some critics believe that the new law is inadequately funded and might not be the panacea that many hoped for.

Innovations that have proved successful in preventing homelessness in other countries, such as Housing First, Trauma Informed Care and Critical Time Intervention (CTI) are slowly making their way to the UK and should help to prevent rough sleeping. The government has recently convened a dedicated Rough Sleeping Advisory Group tasked with halving rough sleeping within four years. And there is a growing community of 'experts by experience' willing and able to share their stories about what works in homelessness prevention. But we still face a chronic housing shortage that won't be solved any time soon. We still face a welfare system that seems disproportionately punitive especially to those unable to work. And we still face significant cuts to those frontline services that are best placed to act early and avoid costly crisis interventions further down the line. So it's not that we don't know how to prevent homelessness: rather, it is that the solutions to homelessness cost money and speak to our country's obsession with property ownership as a privilege not a human right.

'We need to relinquish our obsessive grip on housing as a commodity and see it as a resource'

To prevent homelessness we need to relinquish our obsessive grip on housing as a commodity and see it as a resource. We also need a welfare safety net that works for people in chronic housing need. In recent years there has been a tendency to see homelessness and rough sleeping as inevitable, even acceptable. Yet in so many cases a small amount of help provided in the right way at the right time could make all the difference. At Homeless Link our vision is of a country where everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it. To achieve this we need to shift the balance of service provision away from crisis interventions and towards effective early action and prevention. More than anything, prevention means treating homeless people as people first, with rights, strengths and aspirations rather than being somehow different from the rest of us. Preventing homelessness benefits us all.

Rick Henderson has been the CEO of [Homeless Link](#) since July 2012. He is a member of the Government's National Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel and the London Mayor's Rough Sleeping Task Group. Rick also represents Homeless Link internationally, as a member of FEANTSA – the European homelessness network and the Housing First Europe Hub.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS KEY TO PREVENTION



IDEAS FROM CAROLINE SLOCOCK

There's a famous saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child' and of course strong communities do a lot more, besides. When it comes to prevention – helping people lead happy lives as well as giving support when needed – the places we live in, or what I call social infrastructure, have a vital role.

This may seem obvious. We all know what we value in the places we live, or the places we grew up in. Estate agents point to good housing and schools, access to good healthcare and safe and crime-free communities. When we are making decisions about whether to live in a place, we look not just for employment opportunities but also for those green and recreational spaces, those places to meet, to shop and have fun and learn, and warm to a built environment that makes you feel comfortable, safe and relaxed.

These are all part of social infrastructure, of course, but it also includes less tangible things – the

feeling that you can trust your neighbours, that people look after each other and cherish their shared environment. An ability to influence the things that matter, to have a real say, and not have change imposed. Ideal places like these are rich in associative activity and community, voluntary and faith organisations and groups, as well as having a prosperous private sector and well-run and responsive public services. All of these organisations will be working together to build a good place.

'As policy-makers and practitioners we have a blind spot'

As people, we know good social infrastructure when we see it but, as policy-makers and practitioners, I think we have a blind spot. We only really talk about it indirectly: 'communities left behind' or 'deprived communities', phrases which the people who live in these places often hate because it makes *them* feel trashed. Or policy makers and

practitioners only see a part of social infrastructure, public services in particular, neglecting the fact that buildings, the environment and strong communities are essential too.

Places rich in social infrastructure are naturally preventative, helping to create well-being, generating resourcefulness and resilience and providing social networks that provide support when things get tough. Unfortunately, places poor in social infrastructure can end up on a downward spiral – people and businesses want to move out, homes and shops become vacant, unemployment, crime and vandalism rises. People start to trust each other less, and feel people will not pull together to make them better. Social and health problems increase. Services become more focused on tackling crises, rather than helping to build the individual and social resourcefulness that helps avoid problems in the first place or which provides the social networks, facilities and services that can help nip any problems that do arise in the bud.

Many people still benefit from an earlier, golden age of investment in social infrastructure. Many schools, hospitals, sewers, libraries, public parks and sports facilities originate from that period and were effectively common goods, held in public

ownership for the benefit of the public. The welfare state, which was also designed to reduce poverty and illness, provided another, national expression of the belief that collective investment in mutual health and well-being is to everyone's benefit.

'A loss of assets'

But this is being eroded. Over the last decade, there has been a quiet reduction in social infrastructure assets either from closure, sales or poor maintenance – playing fields and play areas, children centres and youth services, libraries and arts facilities have all been affected to name but a few. As well as a loss of assets, our collective sense of the value of commonly owned social infrastructure has reduced and public support for the welfare state has declined.

We talk about poverty and income inequalities but some places are very much richer in social infrastructure than others and this also makes a real difference to personal health and well-being, equality and opportunity.

The answer?

First, we need to value and protect existing social infrastructure. Greater investment is needed, particularly

in those communities that have the poorest social infrastructure; and a good starting point is to map what assets exist.

'Recognising the rich resources that may already exist'

Second, it's not just about money, it's also about recognising the rich resources that may already exist, many of which may be non-financial, and also giving communities a real say over what happens in their community and about where any new investment goes.

Thirdly, it's important to think holistically. Attending to one element without thinking of the others can be counterproductive. For example, strong communities are harder to create without physical places to

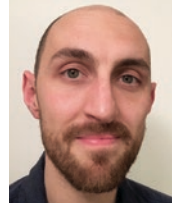
meet. Good health benefits from recreational facilities and ready access to good food.

Finally, social infrastructure is strengthened by working collaboratively and right across sectors.

People who believe in prevention need to attend not just to the child (and the adult the child later becomes) but also to 'the villages' in which we all live.

Caroline Slocock is the Director of Civil Exchange and the co-convenor of a Better Way. Her previous roles include CEO of the Equal Opportunities Commission and she started her career in central government. She is a member of the Early Action Task Force and author of *Valuing Social Infrastructure*.

GROWING CULTURAL CAPITAL: A NEW DIRECTION



A CASE STUDY BY LAWRENCE WALKER

Cultural capital could change the world, and we've been looking at how to do that for young people in London, helping them to break out of what have become increasingly managed, restricted and unhealthy lives.

At university I discovered a French sociologist called Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu was an observer of the everyday. He was interested in social change and the struggles and solidarities of daily life. He believed that in addition to economic and social capital, a person has 'cultural capital' – education, knowledge, language, habits – that develop first in childhood and through time influences the ability to get ahead in life. His hypothesis was essentially that cultural capital confers status and sustains social hierarchies across society. His ideas were formative, let's say.

'Arts and culture help young people know who they are, engage, navigate choices'

At a [New Direction](#), we think a lot about culture's role in society and the lives of children and young people, particularly in London where we do most of our work. We are interested in understanding the notion that engagement in arts and culture through childhood helps young people to know who they are, engage with the world around them and navigate choices, as they get older.

Because the thing is, London's children and young people are not very happy, nor are they doing as well as they could be: thirty-seven per cent of children live in poverty after housing costs are taken into account; more than 110,000 children, or around one in ten, suffer with significant mental ill-health; obesity levels are rising, there are high levels of youth unemployment, especially for less advantaged groups, and there is increasing polarisation between young and old.

'A different conversation that positions culture as a positive, freeing force'

For the past ten years, we have been working to open up the city's cultural resources for all young Londoners to experience and enjoy. We encounter the same systemic issues confronting communities up and down the land – issues relating to inequality, power, relationships, identity, ownership, representation etc. Our work is most effective when the systems and infrastructure supporting children and young people – schools, nurseries, arts organisations, health providers, statutory services – take account of their need to play, be creative and experience culture. Through research and innovative partnerships, we are able to have a different conversation that positions culture as a positive, freeing force in the lives of children and young people. These days we are having to work smarter than ever before, when the role of arts and culture in supporting social and economic development is given less attention, and at a time when the education system favours academic subjects over more creative pursuits.

Frustration with supply side deficit models, i.e. this is culture – you should consume it, has compelled us to explore new ways of interpreting how cultural opportunities operate

for young people within ecosystems – complex, fluid networks operating within and across a range of contexts – from home, school and locality, to nation, global society and the virtual world. Last year we published a research report with Kings College London called *Caring about Cultural Freedom* that promotes a model of 'supported autonomy', where it is the job of the cultural learning system (teachers, artists, parents, peers) to enable each individual to explore creativity in their own way, not to provide 'access' to a pre-determined cultural offer. Principles of caring, autonomy and democracy are informing our work going forward, helping us to think through how we develop the practice of supporting ecosystems and approaches to collaborative projects that are attentive and responsive to the views and needs of young people.

There is an opportunity to apply some of this thinking through *Challenge London*, a place-based partnership programme that a New Direction manages on behalf of Arts Council England. Over the next four years we will co-invest around £2 million in collaborative projects that seek to develop sustainable models of cultural learning. We are hoping to build on *twelve existing initiatives* in places like:

- Hackney – where we are working with architects and planners to investigate what child-friendliness might mean on one estate.
- Kensington and Chelsea – where young people devised and led an enquiry about future progression pathways and leading independent lives.
- Croydon – where a youth collective is running a campaign to make young people’s voices central to decision making processes in local developments.
- Barking and Dagenham – where a partnership has conceived a cultural citizenship programme rooted in the concept of a cultural entitlement for all school pupils.

Lessons from our work are that many children’s lives have an increasingly managed quality, dominated by homework and school. Young people lack freedom and space for self-organised activity, and anxiety about crime can lead parents to restrict their behaviour. Young people need to be able to play and explore – this is how resilience, curiosity and creativity are nurtured, and ultimately how new forms of cultural capital will change the world.

Lawrence Walker is a practitioner with ten years of experience supporting new forms of leadership and social change in communities across the UK. He is currently leading development for London’s flagship creative education agency for children and young people. In his spare time he runs a Big Local project in William Morris, Walthamstow.

Building on strengths is better than focusing on weaknesses

Even in the most difficult circumstances people and communities have much to offer. They are well placed to come up with the solutions, and to take action accordingly. Defining people by their 'needs' or deficits, and doing things for or to rather than with them, creates dependency. Creating conditions where people can flourish on their own terms sets them free.



Department of Dependency and Care
Cartoon by Crippen
Included by kind permission of Dave Lupton

THE GOOD AND THE BAD



A PERSONAL STORY BY CLARE WIGHTMAN

I work in Spon End, in Coventry. Like people, neighbourhoods can get a reputation that stops you from seeing the good in them. People call Spon End 'the Bronx of Coventry' – people who've never been to the real Bronx. The story I am going to tell you now is about the good and the bad in my neighbourhood.

Chris, Margaret and their daughter lived on a tough estate. Some neighbours spotted their vulnerability. Pretending to be friends, people like Linda would come in, take over the flat and use their phone. This went on for years. Then things got even worse. Margaret told us they were hounded by some people. 'They swore and shouted at us, put rubbish through our letterbox. They would knock our door at night with masks on. They even stole our daughter's birthday balloons and banners. It was horrible. We phoned the police but they didn't take us seriously.'

The turning point came when we got alongside an older neighbour

and talked about the problem with her. Next time she reported the harassment to the police. She could write down what happened and when. Chris and Margaret felt reassured that she spoke up for them. We talked to the local shopkeeper too and asked them to keep an eye out.

We introduced Chris and Margaret to another couple, Robin and Christine, who invited them for a BBQ and movie nights. The two men enjoy vegetable gardening. In fact, there is a growing community of gardeners that help each other out – including that older neighbour who called the police.

'It makes all the difference when we've got people around us'

It makes all the difference when we've got people around us who can help us to get over problems, and not feel we're stuck on our own. And help is available in communities if we know how to find it.

Faced with Chris and Margaret's experiences we had a choice. We could have just given them a service, a set of transactions – called the police, called the social landlord, supported them to have their say in meetings and make reports to both. But then at the close of day they'd have gone home, to the estate, alone.

We choose to help them get some real friends instead. We knew that real friends would help draw the couple in from the edge, from living on the thin ice that left them vulnerable to the type of abuse that was escalating towards them. Building on strengths is better than

focusing on weaknesses. There were real strengths in that community as well as threats and communities are powerful when people act together. They can solve problems that professionals on their own can't.

This story cuts to the heart of what we could offer in a very difficult climate for people and services alike.

Clare Wightman is the CEO of [Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire](#) and relationships are at the heart of their work. Clare particular interest is working in a way that develops and connects networks of local people for mutual help and support.

TREATING LIVED EXPERIENCE AS AN ASSET, NOT A RISK



A PERSONAL STORY BY MARK JOHNSON

In 2007, I had built up a successful aboriginal business employing people just out of prison and people recovering from substance abuse issues, after my own experiences of prison and drugs. I received a Mirror Pride of Britain Award and began working with and advising government and charities on the criminal justice system.

I saw the power of using my experiences to advise, consult, design and deliver. At one point it afforded me the opportunity to address an audience of 300 Ministry of Justice HR professionals at an event. I was quite anxious, speaking in a rarefied building literally yards from where I had slept rough in London a few years before.

I did what felt like the only thing I could do, and told the audience that I was there to tell the truth about what I saw in the criminal justice

system, and that if my observations offended anyone I was sorry for that.

I explained their services were failing, that in their system I was just an ex-offender, with a DBS record that told them everything I had done wrong. Yet I was excluded from their workplace, the design of their services and other areas of employment. I asked them to look around their office: 'What do you really know about your colleagues?' They could manage my 'risk' because they knew more about me in that regard than their workmates. They couldn't argue. I said they weren't managing risk, they were indulging in risk aversion. Fortunately, my views were well received.

The truth about my experiences was my most powerful weapon in that speech, and I went on to do more work within criminal justice, and ten years ago founded User Voice, an

organisation that uses council models in prison and probation to get the voice of service users into service design and delivery – over ninety per cent of our sixty staff are former service users.

User Voice was built on using the strengths of people and ignoring what others see as deficiencies. User Voice focuses on the strengths of lived experience not on the perceived weaknesses of lack of education, qualifications and professional track record.

'For too long we have had a 'colonialist' approach'

User Voices sees the lived experience of someone who has experienced drug addiction, or time spent in prison, as expertise. For too long we have had a 'colonialist' approach to delivering answers to social problems in which lived experience was excluded.

This has caused an inherent mistrust – the fact that a certain strata of society gets access to the best education and into positions of power has caused this mistrust. Our staff have the ability to fully engage with service users because they have walked in their shoes and gained insight from their own experiences

and are in a better place to elicit the experiences and insights from current service users.

We see lived experience as an asset, not a risk. It is not a reason to exclude people but a reason to include them.

It became obvious to me that this lived experience has a place, by right, in the systems we use to address social problems. I created an organisation that not only focuses on these strengths and that has changed the way services are delivered in prisons and probation, but that has also shifted the paradigm around the inclusion of former and current service users in designing and delivering services they receive. We started ten years ago when this was unheard-of – it has become a movement, as far as I am concerned, and you see organisations employing user-led approaches on a more regular basis. The danger is, of course, that if it is done badly, or in a piece-meal way, the results are not just ineffective but counter-productive. And that's the truth.

Mark Johnson is a social entrepreneur and founder/CEO of the criminal justice charity [User Voice](#), a national organisation whose work to reduce offending is led and delivered by ex-offenders. He started User Voice from scratch ten years ago and CanDo coffee in 2015. He is an Ashoka fellow.

JANE SLOWEY AND ADVANTAGED THINKING



IDEAS FROM COLIN FALCONER, IN MEMORY OF JANE

Jane believed that charity should inspire action through the stories it amplifies. Back in 2004, when Jane joined the youth housing charity, the Foyer Federation, the narrative about young people was predominately negative. Too often, we knew more about what young people couldn't do than what they could. We talked about the need to help people cope, without always understanding or caring that people also need to thrive. Jane wanted to invest in a different, more honest story. Where to begin?

'To start living again, to have a good life. Begin with opportunity'

My mind returns to a reception at Foyles bookshop for a Foyer Federation poetry competition. It was summer 2006 and Jane was eighteen months into her new CEO role. One of the poems that night expressed young people's belief 'to start living again, to have a good life'. Jane was instantly attracted

to this as an idea: if we knew the ingredients for a good life, shouldn't we ensure they formed part of the deal for everyone to access? Jane and I reflected that the origin of Foyer in France was rooted in the question of transition – how to build an alternative induction into the shifting life of adulthood. 'Why don't we do that?' Jane suggested. It was our step into asset-based thinking: look towards a positive transition; begin with the opportunity.

The fruits of Jane's early success in leading more transition-focused programme design led to a research trip to the States in 2007. I explored services using 'developmental asset' models and returned home to express these through a social action employability programme funded by the Housing Corporation, a 'better youth offer' inquiry funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and a 'healthy transitions' programme funded by the Big Lottery.

It was not until 2009, though, that our interest in asset-based thinking found a distinctive identity. With ideas flourishing in multiple directions, Jane instructed me to write a coherent frame for our work. A post-Wimbledon article on the demise of British tennis offered an unlikely analogy to the state of youth provision. Yet, within it, I glimpsed our first blueprint for a more personalised approach to spot, coach, and promote people's talents. I remember my trepidation as I handed over a draft manifesto outlining the purpose for youth services to 'Open Talent'. Jane's response was swift: 'I stopped correcting your phrasing after page two because I was too excited by the content.' What excited Jane was not just a clearer vision for the next strategic plan – it was the wider call for systems change, in which everyone had a voice and role to play.

Open Talent embraced strengths-based practice, the asset-based community development model, the sustainable livelihoods approach, and the ethics of good youth work that underpinned the original holistic ethos of Foyers, fusing these together into an exciting hybrid. Funding soon followed from Virgin Unite, Esmée Fairbairn and others, supporting national pilots that freed up local innovation. But *Open*

Talent was not always an easy sell at a time when 'poverty porn' and deficit-based provision still went largely unquestioned. It was in an attempt to answer the doubters that we stumbled on the concepts of 'disadvantaged' and 'advantaged' thinking. We were trying to characterise the differences between problem-focused programmes seeking funding for an easy fix to disadvantage, and those willing to risk exploring the 'advantages' more likely to generate real capability for people and communities to shape their own solutions. This became the theme for a TEDx speech that I delivered in Greece in April 2011.

'We wanted to rebrand the narrative of 'disadvantage''

Actually, Jane had been invited to talk, but she sent me instead because she believed I would get more from the opportunity. That was always her brilliance as a leader, to harness the abilities of others. Using TEDx as a platform, we launched an Advantaged Thinking adventure to find the 'people, places, opportunities, deal and campaign' to develop young people's talents. We wanted to rebrand the narrative of 'disadvantage'. For Jane, that meant creating space for people and organisations to work together in changing the story.

The approach found an ally through Foyer Foundation Australia and partner organisations such as Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). I was first dispatched to Australia in November 2011, with a speech illustrating how the end of youth homelessness could only be found in knowing how to shape the beginnings of youth talent. Years later, it is Australia leading the way. BSL is the first organisation to work with me to recast Advantaged Thinking into resources that will help embed a sustainable asset-based DNA across different communities of practice. Their spirit of collaboration has made me feel alive again.

What a journey. The words we heard at Foyles ended up touching the other side of the world. Now, they reverberate back in greater strength and meaning. 'That', Jane would have smiled, 'is Advantaged Thinking. What do you think?'

Colin Falconer is Director of [Inspirechilli](#), an innovation consultancy that harnesses asset-based approaches for organisations across the UK to Australia. Colin has worked in various education, employment and quality assurance initiatives, including fourteen years as Director of Innovation at Foyer Federation where he introduced the concept of Advantaged Thinking.

LIVED EXPERIENCE AND PEER SUPPORT AT GROUNDSWELL



A CASE STUDY BY STEVEN PLATTS

Homelessness is a significant factor in health inequality within our society, and people experiencing homelessness can have extremely poor health compared to the general population. Groundswell's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (HHPA) project empowers people to overcome the barriers to accessing care through the provision of Peer Advocates, all of whom have previous experience of homelessness themselves.

The peer support model breaks down barriers to engagement with healthcare services amongst 'hard-to-reach' groups through the ability of peers to draw on their shared experience to develop trusting relationships. The model is simple, peers are there to support people to attend appointments they would otherwise avoid and advocate for them to get the right service when they are there. Even simple things like

registering with a GP can be very difficult for people with no address and there are a plethora of other hurdles to overcome before even thinking about their health.

People who work with our advocates report that their confidence and knowledge to engage with the management and treatment of their healthcare increases. It's been proven that with the support of HHPA, people are able to act more independently and have the motivation to proactively manage their own health. For example the support of a peer advocate leads to earlier diagnosis of health conditions, preventing deterioration and further complications down the line.

'Groundswell achieves not just a massive increase in access to health services but also fosters an atmosphere where clients know change is possible' – Hostel Manager

'If it weren't for Groundswell I reckon I would have been dead now. That's how much it made an impact in my life.' – HHPA Client.

It was Groundswell's own research that led to the creation of HHPA. The *More than a Statistic* report revealed that one of the key barriers that people who are homeless face to getting healthcare is registering with a GP, and *The Escape Plan* found that 'involvement in a group' is key to moving on from homelessness. Activities like volunteering are invaluable – giving people opportunities to engage with things beyond day-to-day existence, increasing self-worth and confidence. As with peer advocacy, all our research is carried out by people who were homeless themselves enabling them to break down barriers of mistrust through shared experiences, and get to the heart of issues affecting homeless people.

'The Give a Lot – Get a Lot ethos'

Groundswell embraces the ideas of participation. The 'Give A Lot – Get A Lot' ethos is central to our understanding of participation – the idea that to be a part of something you need to invest in it and there needs to be clear benefits that you get in return. Many beneficiaries of the service go on

to be peer advocates and in turn many advocates go on to work in the sector and for Groundswell. Over half our roles are filled by people with lived experience of homelessness, from casework to finance and project management.

This development pathway from beneficiary to peer to staff is effective because our progression coaches use an asset-based approach to support people, enabling them to tap into their skills and experiences to decide on the next steps in their lives. Over the next six months, new funding streams will enable at least three more advocates to move into paid, skilled roles in our growing team. The insight they will bring us is invaluable.

The themes of lived experience and participation should guide all of Groundswell's decision-making and future work. With the thread of lived experience running right through everything we do, the formal and informal mechanisms to listen and learn are right there for all of us. As HHPA expands in London and across England and our body of peer-led research grows, we will be guided by more and more people with the knowledge needed to develop new solutions to the systemic causes of homelessness. By building on the strengths of our community

rather than focusing on their needs, the Groundswell team will have the skills and experience it needs to effectively implement these solutions and enable more and more people to move out of homelessness.



Steven Platts became CEO of [Groundswell](#) in 2018 and has over fifteen years' experience working with vulnerable people. He started his career as a hostel keyworker in Lambeth and has worked in South-East Asia with refugees and marginalised groups. In 2010 he led Glass Door to expand its supported winter shelter model in London.

THE BENSHAM FOOD CO-OP: FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS AND MUTUALITY



A CASE STUDY BY OLLIE BATCHELOR

It was another busy session at the Bensham Food Co-op in Gateshead this week. From early morning, the building was a hive of activity as helpers wheeled out food trolleys, set up the tables and laid out the produce. Within half an hour the space at the back of the church was transformed into a colourful market place; trays of fresh fruit and vegetables, bags of lentils and chick peas, mountains of bread and pastries, rice, flour, cous-cous and pasta of all shapes and sorts as well as eggs and numerous useful tinned items. The rich aroma of herbs and spices filled the air – cumin and coriander, chilli and turmeric, mint and rosemary. As the Co-op opened its doors there was a buzz of excitement as members met up with people they knew, went to select their food and talked together over coffee and cake.

'A community of mutual support'

The Co-op began as a partnership between three organisations. Corpus Christi Church provides free space for the weekly marketplace which is overseen by two small local Charities – Peace of Mind which helps refugees and asylum seekers and Soul Food Spaces which seeks to feed people physically, emotionally and spiritually. The three groups first met in Autumn 2015 at a local event to develop initiatives around food in the local area. The representatives of the three organisations recognised that they had different strengths but similar values, goals and ideas and all wanted to provide a different model of a food bank. We settled on a co-operative, with free, unlimited access to fresh produce for anyone who showed up and a community of mutual support and care built around the ideas, strengths and abilities of those who came along.

In the two years it has been running we have been able to provide fresh food for around 120 people every week, more than 11,000 in total, costing about £3000 a year. The Co-op's remit has grown as people have identified other needs or suggested things they would like to help with. Clothes, kitchen utensils, toiletries, books and toys are now available too, we have a tea and coffee area where people can sit and talk over refreshments, we serve soup and bread through the winter and there is a growing sense of community and belonging amongst the regulars. Kindnesses abound – one person came back at lunchtime having cooked a meal for the volunteers using items she had been given only an hour or so before. Another member often provides recipes or makes something to show people how to use vegetables that are less well known such as beetroot or aubergine. Co-operation extends beyond the immediate membership to surrounding schools, neighbours and nearby workplaces, who have heard about us and contribute food, goods, money or time.

'A positive, welcoming place where members play a part'

When we began, however, there were many voices of dissent from other organisations and 'experts' who told us we would be exploited by freeloaders, that it would be easier for us to manage if we gave out packs of food and cheaper to resource if we had just tinned and non-perishable items. Others said there would be a divide between refugees and asylum seekers and local poor people. The comments about the people we wanted to help were generalisations and defined them in terms of their situation. In short they were simply 'needy' and as such were the deserving (and undeserving) poor. Almost as a consequence unimaginative, low quality food seemed to be all they were worth. We chose instead to define them by who they are, their skills, their stories, their lives and their strengths, not by their deficits or weaknesses. And they deserved the very best we could offer. Our experience has shown that focussing on strengths and mutuality values

people and helps to create a sense of belonging and community. Members are happy to come along to a positive, welcoming place where they play a part and are able to grow as people, increasing in confidence and self-esteem. In time, most move on but they often return to share good news – a new baby, a job, a new home.

Nobody quite knows how the Food Co-operative will develop in the future, but the lessons so far are plain to see: every person matters and brings their own strengths and qualities to the table so that together we can achieve more than we could

ever do alone or even imagine in our wildest dreams. And in doing this each of us is blessed by the other. This is the better way that we seek and everyone involved in the Bensham Community Food Co-op tries to live this out in the way we treat each other and in the way we work together.

Ollie Batchelor lives in Gateshead and has worked most of his life in the social care sector, focussing on addictions, in London, Edinburgh and the North East. He was a member of the Newcastle Fairness Commission and is a trustee of Soul Food Spaces, Lankelly Chase Foundation and Just Meditation.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE BETTER THAN IMPERSONAL TRANSACTIONS

Deep value is generated through relationships between people and the commitments people make to each other. We find this first and foremost in families, communities and neighbourhoods, but organisations in every sector need to do more to treat people with humanity and as individuals and so generate deep value too.

CATTLE MACHINE = EDUCATION SYSTEM



A POEM BY ALICIA MOORE

is it that I'm just a waste of space, an oxymoron tiptoeing on the balance
 it is that I can be replaced, upgraded perhaps by a robot in time,
 or someone less stressed than I

is it that every time I cry, a part of me dies already, slips away in the tear
 pieces of my skin

we're hear to help, says everyone
 the college, the education system itself that does not adapt for those different
 for those who cannot fit the mould

I am a square trying to fit through a circle
 perhaps just a blot of ink on an otherwise perfect canvas
 but I am unique, and have learned to appreciate my flaws
 an obsession with time that maddens my brain everyday
 an inability to socialise with a brain that turns white noise every time somebody's
 voice hits it

it has come to a point where
 I refuse to speak anymore because my voice has been silenced by the masses
 because no one understands really do they? does anyone understand another
 as much as they do themselves?

an inability to empathise because it's all about money
 so we can go to school, to go to college, to uni, to job to money, money, money
 we're a cattle machine, a never ending cycle
 we're every battery hen in a cage, we're on a conveyer belt of our making
 life is for the taking

so every time someone tells you to just 'get over it'
remember that you, too, are human
and you should love yourself
put your mental health before a mindset of corruption and the taming of the
human being
the enslaving of every mind
I have missed five years of education yet I can still read and write, I wrote
this poem
in fact, in a test it is more a construction of who can remember the most than
who knows anything
who does know anything?
but know thyself
love thyself
all these years of education but no one is taught how to love, love ourselves,
love others,
know thyself
that is what it most important

Alicia Moore is 16 and likes to write poetry and songs. She missed five years of education on and off due to illness and struggled hugely to fit back in to the system and with her peer group. The poem is a reflection of her feelings about a system which she feels is inflexible and only adds to the stress young people feel on an almost daily basis.

IT'S RELATIONSHIPS, NOT TRANSACTIONS, THAT 'GET YOU THROUGH' THE BAD TIMES



A PERSONAL STORY BY JULIA UNWIN

Everyday life is full of transactions. Buy a ticket, jump on a train, pay for over-priced not very good coffee, tap an oyster card, rush to a meeting, text the next event to say I'm running late. And increasingly each of those transactions is done without even making eye contact, speaking or even handing over cash. A tap of a card, a wave of an e-ticket on a mobile phone – a daily life mediated by machines and technology has bought ever greater speed, and ever fewer human contacts.

And when life is going well, and the sun is shining, in every sense, that way of living has its own satisfaction.

'Everyday life is enriched by love and by friendship and laughter'

But everyday life is not always sunny and can never be made up of a series of transactions. Everyday life is muddled by sadness and loss, by

joy and by anxiety. It is enriched by love and by friendship and laughter. It responds to our full humanity, not the particular parts that we show to the world.

Ten years ago, one of my children, then fourteen, became seriously ill. In my busy professional transaction filled life I simply had to stop. I entered a whole new world of transactions – of blood tests and x-rays, of hospital appointments and complicated treatment plans. And I discovered, once again, that all my professionalism and all my skill and knowledge could not cope with the transaction led life. We faltered and missed appointments. I got confused by the drug charts. Members of the family were angry. Others couldn't talk about it. Others still wanted reassurance that it couldn't happen to them and looked for causes that kept them safe.

And through it all, and finally a good recovery, what I remember is the relationships. The teacher at school who first noticed something not quite right, and then made it easy for a sick child to come back to school. The nurses who managed not to call me 'mum' but to remember my name. The hospital porter who twinkled, teased us and made us laugh as we walked down the endlessly long corridor to the operating theatre. The GP who checked in to see how we were all doing, not just the patient. The hospital receptionist who always managed to tell us how good we were looking, when it was clearly not true! The consultant who referred us for brilliant counselling when all was better. But, of course, what united all those gestures were their humanity, and their recognition of our humanity. An understanding that we were more than a sick teenager, more than a troubled family, we were a complex mixture of feelings and fears, and that, if we were going to get through this we needed to be treated as the people we were, not the conditions we showed.

All that was a decade ago, and as I go to my GP for something much more trivial and tap in via a

reception screen which recognises me by date of birth and postcode, and pick up my automated prescription, I do wonder whether in the interests of speed and efficiency that kindness which helped our joint recovery might now be much more difficult to find. I wonder if the diagnosis might have taken longer, the treatment been less effective, and the long-term damage very much worse.

Transactions may be fine when you're buying a ticket to go on a train. But when you're sad, or angry, lonely or sick, it's the relationships that will get you through. In our much faster world we cannot take them for granted, but without them we will all risk being much more frail, much more vulnerable even if the component parts of our experience are dealt with perfectly professionally.

Julia Unwin was the Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation from 2007 until the end of 2016. She has been a Charity Commissioner, Chair of the Refugee Council and Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency and, amongst her many current roles, is chairing the Independent Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society, [Civil Society Futures](#).

A GOOD PUBLIC SERVANT



A PERSONAL STORY BY DAVID ROBINSON

I remember the date, December 17th, which is odd. I never remember dates.

All the consulting rooms were occupied so the young doctor took us to the corner of an almost empty waiting room. It's cancer. Just like that. Come back at 8.45 tomorrow. See the consultant. Talk then about treatment and prognosis.

We came back and saw the consultant and met Ann for the first time. She was already sitting in the room before the surgeon rattled through the diagnosis and the 'options', Grade 3 early stage, surgery before Christmas, chemo, radiotherapy...

Then he left.

'Is there anything you would like to ask?' said Ann.

Long pause.

'Grade 3' said Frances, my wife, 'is that good?'

Ann explained the numbers. 3 isn't good but she didn't say that. Nothing was ever good or bad, the right thing or the wrong thing, everything was part of a picture. No one had all the answers but everything that was known would be known to us and there was no choice that we wouldn't make together.

Ann was our Expert Nurse. She popped up at the appointments, there after surgery, first days in radiotherapy, with us in chemo, remembering our son's nativity play and the football, always asking after the girls, separately, by name. Actually of course probably not remembering anything at all but taking careful notes because when sensitivities are raw it is the tiny personal things that become the biggest and the most important.

We could, she assured us, ring her day or night. Of course, knowing that we could meant we almost never did. My wife was the patient but Ann was very clear – I too could

talk at any time. I was troubled by figures. If Frances had this treatment or that her chances of survival would improve by eighteen per cent or forty-six or twenty-seven. I wondered what it meant, what were the real choices, did the percentages add up? If she did everything would she live forever? I rang, a little sheepish about the questions.

'If I told you, David, that if we did these four things Frances would have a ninety-nine per cent chance of survival you would only ask another question: is she in the ninety nine or is she the one? I couldn't answer that. So let's talk about her and the treatments and what she wants to do, forget the numbers.'

I have been in and around public services all my life, mostly delivering not receiving them. It might seem strange that my story for this series should recount my experience as a service user but it is in this role, when relationships matter most and when the smallest consideration is a felt experience, that the Better Way principles become most visceral, vivid and powerfully evident.

'Deep value is generated through relationships'

We of the Better Way network believe that 'deep value is generated through relationships between people and the commitments people make to each other. We find this first and foremost in families, communities and neighbourhoods. But organisations in every sector need to do more to treat people with humanity and as individuals and so generate deep value too.

Of course caring relationships feel good but do they actually affect the outcome of the service – the real question for the commissioner and the tax payer? In the Community Links *Deep Value Literature Review* we considered the evidence on the role of effective relationships in employment services, education, health and legal advice. Revisiting this work six years on I am still thunderstruck by the sheer weight of the evidence. We discovered for example, that 'the relationship between the advisor and the client in employment services has

consistently been found to be a key element (in) helping people into employment', that 'pupils who develop positive relationships with teachers go on to achieve better academic results,' and that 'patients who experience a good relationship with their healthcare professional are more likely to engage in positive behaviour change'. Deep Value Literature Review. Smerdon M. Bell K. Community Links 2011

'A good public servant'

Several years on I understand: Ann wasn't an angel from heaven. She wasn't even our friend, not really. Ann was a good public servant thriving in a role and a context that enabled her to do an important job well. I value her work now, professionally and analytically. We valued it then, personally and profoundly.

David Robinson founded [Community Links](#) and is now Senior Adviser and chair of the Early Action Task Force. He is also a co-founder, now Chair, of [Shift](#) and a Fellow at the LSE's Marshall institute. His current work on relationships and the warm web can be viewed at <http://shiftdesign.org.uk/the-you-and-me-principle/>

OUR NEIGHBOUR



A PERSONAL STORY BY STEVE WYLAR

A few days after we moved in I started to clear the weeds in our back garden. As I worked I could hear an angry mumbling. It was our neighbour, a small and elderly woman with a withered arm. She stood at her back door and glared at me.

'Would you like me to cut down your weeds? I said after a bit. 'Why?' she asked suspiciously. 'They are quite high' I replied. That was an understatement. 'You can if you want,' she muttered, turned her back on me and went inside.

'She narrowed her eyes'

A few days later I saw her again. She narrowed her eyes. 'What were you doing in my garden?' she demanded. 'I was cutting back your weeds' I said. She looked at the stubble. 'You didn't do it very well' she snapped.

She thought for a bit. 'Come in and make me some tea,' she said.

So I sat there in her kitchen, drinking tea with her, after boiling the water in a pan on her stove which lit with a thump of hissing gas. Her bed was in the kitchen. It seemed it was the only room she used in the house. She hadn't been upstairs in at least ten years. I noticed there was no downstairs toilet, only an outhouse in the garden.

'I'm 93 and I'm not good on my feet any more' she told me, 'but I manage quite well, thanks to the dust.' 'The dust?' I asked. 'Yes, you know, Jimmy and Sarah.' Jimmy, it turned out, was a local dustman, and he and his wife did the shopping for her and came round and cooked her meals three or four times a week. She complained about them terribly. 'I pay them five pounds a week, but I think they're cheating me. And they are always telling tales about everyone. I don't like people who gossip.'

'Don't you get any help from the Council?' I asked. 'Oh I don't want

anything to do with them,' she said, getting quite agitated.

A few weeks later, her kitchen ceiling fell in, showering plaster over her bed. Along with Jimmy and Sarah we cleared up a bit, and tried to contact her landlord. It turned out that the landlord was based in an overseas tax haven, and the agent was a subsidiary of Lloyds Bank. We went to the agent's offices. 'We are very sorry this has happened' they said, 'we will arrange for the ceiling to be repaired but she will have to move out while we do it.' So we contacted Social Services. 'We are very sorry this has happened' they said, 'We will arrange for an assessment to be made.'

'She's not able to look after herself', they decided after the assessment, 'we'll have to put her into care.' So she ended up in a home. Within a few weeks she couldn't recognise anyone, and a few months later she died. I think she had even forgotten her own name. It was Marie.

'Often people don't want "services"'

This all happened twenty years ago. Why do I remember Marie today? Because she reminds me that it is all too easy for people to become isolated, neglected, avoided. People might need support and even

protection but often they don't want 'services'. What they really want is other people, people they can get to know a bit, and yes complain about, and who will accept them for what they are, and help them make the best of life.

'Relationships are better than transactions' says the Better Way but that is exactly what is so often missing. Thinking about our neighbour Marie, and how it was the local dustman and his wife who helped her most, for so many years, I wonder whether the best starting point is usually 'community'. Perhaps every service we design should start off by saying, could there be a community solution, which will at least help people make connections and build relationships, on their own terms? So that next time our neighbour's kitchen roof falls in, we are all a bit better prepared to deal with it, or perhaps even prevent it happening in the first place.

Steve Wyler is an independent consultant and writer in the social sector and is the co-convenor of a Better Way. From 2000 to 2014 Steve was Chief Executive of Locality (previously the Development Trusts Association), bringing together local organisations dedicated to community enterprise, community ownership, and social change.

GOOD HELP VERSUS BAD HELP: HOW TO GIVE IT



IDEAS FROM RICHARD WILSON

Whether people want to find work, improve their health or get the most out of education, 'good help' involves understanding what matters to each person, rather than pushing pre-packaged solutions. It's about treating people as people, and starting from them rather than impersonal processes.

Too many people are unnecessarily trapped in negative cycles and lost opportunities perpetuated by 'bad help', even though it may be delivered with the best intentions. These negative cycles have acute and obvious consequences, such as homelessness or addiction, but also chronic and subtle effects which erode confidence and mental health, making everyday activities such as parenting and healthy eating much harder, and sometimes impossible. In addition to the tremendous personal and social costs involved, there are the significant financial costs in getting it wrong.

'Good help' works. Ryan was on and off the streets for twelve years and felt

misunderstood by the people trying to help him. He explains how people 'Always tried to rush me. Telling me what I've got to do.' He was given advice and solutions that felt impersonal and irrelevant. He wasn't asked about his own motivations or what else was going on in his life. Then Ryan met Aisha from Mayday Trust who found out what motivated Ryan, what he cared about and what he felt confident doing.

This 'good help' inspired Ryan to take action. Every person will be different but we've looked at many positive case studies and found that there are three critical factors that enable people to take action:

'Helping people develop their own sense of purpose, confidence and a positive cycle of action'

- **Sense of purpose.** 'Good help' is all about helping people to identify and achieve their own sense of purpose.

- **Confidence to act.** ‘Good help’ is focused on helping people develop their confidence. Some or all of these things may play a part: encouragement; seeing or hearing about others, especially ‘people like you’, achieving a similar goal; personally experiencing some success related to the goal in question and experience that it ‘feels good’ when seeking to achieve your goal.
- **Life circumstances.** Our ability to act is powerfully shaped by the opportunities and barriers that arise in our lives. ‘Good help’ can support people to create a positive cycle of action that helps them move towards their goals. In time, this can lead to transformational changes in their life circumstances.

These are encapsulated by the cycle of action:



If you are involved in the design or delivery of services, whether in the public or voluntary sector, you might want to consider these seven characteristics of ‘good help’ to improve your existing practices.

1. **Power sharing.** The relationships between professionals and people should allow power to be shared rather than ‘directing’ people to do things. An adult-to-adult relationship needs to be established, in which each person’s knowledge and ideas are considered equally.
2. **Enabling conversations.** The way that conversations are structured and that questions are asked can help people to think through what’s important to them and to come up with their own solutions. These conversations build a sense of safety, trust, ownership and motivation for action.
3. **Tailoring.** For help to be transformational, it needs to be personalised. This can be achieved by helping people to define their own purpose and goals. This might sound obvious, but many programmes offer a standardised approach that can feel impersonal and mechanistic.

4. **Scaffolding.** Practitioners can start to step back as the people they help build enough confidence to take action alone. This ensures that change is sustained. Help may need to be ongoing for some people, but should create opportunities for people to take action themselves where possible.
5. **Role modelling and peer support.** Positive relationships expand our sense of what is possible and help us do things we wouldn't attempt alone. Often the most powerful relationships are with people we consider similar to ourselves.
6. **Opportunity making.** Sometimes opportunities need to be created or barriers need to be removed to help people take action. This may require help from an external source. Examples include brokering relationships which lead to new voluntary or paid work, or other health creating or educational activities.
7. **Transparency.** Having open and shared data is an important part of building an adult-adult relationship and supporting people to make informed decisions.

'Good help is about relationships'

'Good help' is about relationships. We focus on the mechanics of those relationships and in particular the touchpoints between services and people, and whether the points enable or disable action.

After publication of OSCA and Nesta's report, *Good Help and Bad Help: how purpose and confidence can transform lives*, we've been holding events across the UK, to bring together those of us offering and inspired by 'good help' and explore what can be done for our impact to be increased. We are finding a great deal of interest, including amongst Better Way members. That's unsurprising, as the approach puts into action so many of the Better Way propositions, and especially 'Human relationships are better than impersonal transactions.'

Richard Wilson is a Director of OSCA and an adviser to the WHO. In 2004, Rich was appointed as the first director of the charity *Involve*, which became a leading centre for public participation research, innovation and policy-making. He is a trustee of the Local Trust and a Clore Social Fellow.

YOU, ME AND THE 'WARM WEB'



IDEAS FROM DAVID ROBINSON

Two elderly women were living independently before they both caught the flu, stopped eating and forgot their regular medication. The first has now been moved, permanently, into a nursing home. The second had been in an allotment group for many years. When she fell sick other members cooked meals, ran errands, checked daily. Now she is back digging onions.

'The warm web: our personal tapestries of real, meaningful relationships'

No one involved would call themselves a carer or even a volunteer. They would say, – indeed did say for these are true stories – 'we did what anyone would do.' Such is the essence of the warm web – our personal tapestries of real, meaningful relationships that enable us to thrive individually and, that in aggregate, enable communities to succeed.

I worry that such bonds are dwindling. We may network

and transact more than ever but meaningful time together is being systematically displaced by fast and shallow connections. The consequential losses are registering daily in the quality of our lives, in our collective capacity, resilience and readiness and in the efficacy of our agencies and our services. I unpicked each of these 'consequential losses' in the LSE 'You and Me' lecture.

Most alarmingly, the sum of the parts in this 'relational poverty' is the kind of structural inequality and 'broken caravan' scenario with which we are already familiar on material poverty – the camels at the front of our society moving so much faster than those at the back that it eventually ceases to be one caravan, one society. Neighbourhoods, cities, nations are built from the interweaving of countless personal relationships – the world wide, warm web. When those ties fail that which is isolating individuals ultimately leaves

behind entire communities distrustful and polarised – fertile territory for xenophobic populism.

So it is that which makes social isolation a 21st century problem has also made Donald Trump the 45th President. When the foundational bonds are inadequate or dysfunctional, so inevitably is the national discourse, unstable and fractious. Trump is the flower in the button-hole of the invisible man.

'Imagine a place where meaningful relationships are the central operating principle'

If we are to benefit from progress in ways which *don't* diminish our humanity but sustain and enrich it, we need to invoke another Better Way principle and act earlier. We need to imagine and realise a place where meaningful relationships are the central operating principle running through everything we do – a 'relationship centred' business, city, school, funding programme, democracy.

In a [series of blogs](#) last year I began to look at what works, draw out some guiding principles, and imagine the 'doable' changes that would embed such relationships everywhere. Here are some examples

The principle: Having fun together builds strong relationships.

The allotment story illustrates well the power of participation. Allotments, choirs, sports clubs, play streets – all enable the building of meaningful connections. Events – street parties, socials, etc play the same role as a sort of social acupuncture – a localised pin prick with the power to catalyse a wider change. We could support more and not just with cash. Essex for example have opened eighty library buildings to 'community keyholders' and a 'Right to Space' could take us further, requiring all local authorities to accommodate such activity where ever there is interest and an open door.

Digital connections should be the beginning of real relationships, the 'fulfilment' not the end and certainly not the enemy. We might ask of existing applications how can we develop this for *everyone*? Tinder for instance – a marginally amended app with alternative branding could also be connecting new arrivals or unsupported carers.

Another principle: Some places enable relationships to thrive, some don't.

Parents know that their local networks improve when their children go to school but some improve more than others. A welcoming playground, a covered waiting area,

seats all make a difference. Just as playgrounds bring us together so do markets, cul de sacs, even shared dustbins. These are the bumping places that we can design properly into where we live or design out. A 'Common Ground Test' added to planning guidelines could ensure it is always in.

The fulfilment centre is the new staple popping up on every high street. How might we design it into our plan for a relationship centred community? What other needs might it 'fulfil' as a regular meeting place?

A third principle: Organisational protocols can obstruct relationships or help them to flourish. If I want my holiday jabs in a busy working day I'll be happy with a 7 am appointment and a clinician I don't know. If I need regular treatment for a chronic condition that keeps me housebound and alone for days I will want a doctor I trust and time for a conversation. GP caseloads could be segmented paying doctors more for patients who need more time. Based on the successful Buurtzorg model, social care might be better delivered by small local teams who are trained and trusted to manage themselves. More broadly services might never be commissioned without demonstrating how they will enable relationships to flourish for those that need them.

Segmentation even works on the high street. Sainsbury's are trialling quick shopping sessions optimising speed for the busy buyer and slow sessions for those who look for companionship. And shouldn't all supermarkets reimagine their cafes – isn't the typical afternoon customer, 1 per table, telling us something?

Now think about your influence.

You may not lead a local authority, commission public services or run a super market but you are a voter, a patient, a customer. And so are many people that you know. The better way – a relationship centred future – is nothing if not a collective effort.

And think about your place. It could be anything – a school, a classroom, a neighbourhood, a council department, a service, a business, the list is endless. How will it change when meaningful relationships are the central operating principle? We would love to know.

David Robinson founded Community Links and is now Senior Adviser and chair of the Early Action Task Force. He is also a co-founder, now Chair, of Shift and a Fellow at the LSE's Marshall institute. His current work on relationships and the warm web is here: <http://shiftdesign.org.uk/the-you-and-me-principle/>

COLLABORATION IS BETTER THAN COMPETITION

Collaboration is the best way to address complex social issues and we need to develop leadership styles that support it. Price-based competitive tendering for public services is harming society and wasting taxpayers' money. Rather than a destructive, value-squeezing contest among a few big corporations in pursuit of shareholder profit, we need a collaborative method that brings together people with a shared interest in a common challenge.

LEADING THOUGHT BY FOLLOWING YOUR HEART NOT YOUR HEAD



A PERSONAL STORY BY KATHY EVANS

Leadership, to me, is a title given by followers not by self-proclamation. So when I was asked to share a personal story as a 'thought leader' in challenging competitive market approaches in the voluntary sector it was a great compliment, but telling that story requires a little honest humility.

It's been five years since I became CEO of Children England, a membership family of children's charities with a proud seventy five year history of collaborating to change children's policy and services for the better. I had twenty two years' experience of working in the children's charity sector so I knew the territory well, but I will openly confess I had no idea whatsoever how to fulfil the role's central expectation of becoming a sector leader – a thought leader – from a 'cold start' in my first CEO role.

'A thought leader: "Who me? Seriously?"'

People often talk about 'imposter syndrome' as if it's a low self-esteem issue, or a tendency to be self-deprecating. I disagree entirely. To me 'imposter syndrome' is simply a name for the fact that that any human being upon whom a big 'external' expectation falls will, in their private inner world where they are just their familiar inner child, be wondering 'Who, me? Seriously? But I'm just making it up as I go along!.' I don't think that's self-deprecation, just honesty about the human condition.

I thought I'd been asked to step up as CEO because they expected me to find clever answers, clever ideas, that no-one had thought of before. Both my inner child and my grown-up professional self knew I

didn't have them, I just couldn't see any. This, I thought, must be when everyone finally finds out I don't know what I'm doing, just like all those 'exam nightmare' dreams had foretold! So instead of waiting for that fated imposter-unveiling event to just happen, I decided to head it off at the pass. I spent half a day presenting to our Trustees (all respected and experienced charity CEOs) all of the things I knew I couldn't do, couldn't answer and couldn't solve: I had no answers to solve our funding problems after losing two thirds of our turnover; no clever ideas to unite our divided competitive sector; no cunning plan to end the competitive marketplace or to create a children's rights revolution.

'Following my conscience, not pretending to have clever leadership plans'

Instead of offering clever answers I asked them for an array of permissions to fail: to make Children England stridently outspoken without waiting for consensus; to spend out their reserves, and to take the charity down in a blaze of campaigning glory if need be, rather than ever seek government money again; and to challenge the competitive contracting marketplace in its entirety, even if meant some of our members might leave our family in

disagreement. This was not a clever answer, a smart plan for impact or a business plan for sustainability – it was about doing the right thing even if it put us out of business. It meant following my conscience, rather than pretending to have any clever leadership plans at all.

With their courageous agreement to my potential kamikaze mission for the charity, a mere matter of months later, in May 2014, the Department for Education sneaked out plans to allow the outsourcing of child protection teams, and everything we'd discussed in theory came hurtling at us in reality. Everyone I spoke to felt that private companies competing for the 'business' of removing children from their families was a rubicon that should never be crossed, but my members also thought the stable door was swinging off its hinges with the horse long gone; they thought charities protesting against outsourcing now would be futile, and seen as too late, too hypocritical. Deep down, I feared exactly the same.

In the space of a fortnight our 'Keep profit out of child protection' campaign achieved its aim and forced Michael Gove to announce a ban on any profit-making firms delivering public child protection functions. It was the quickest

wholesale success in my campaigning career, and we had launched it in the cast-iron belief that we would fail. We'd said nothing clever, nothing new, we'd just stated a simple truth that resonated across charities, public services and the general public – they supported in their thousands, and by joining together we achieved a massive national policy change in mere weeks.

That experience set the tone and the template for everything we've done since, from collaborating to creating our [Declaration of Interdependence](#) to our current ambition to [redesign the welfare state for the 21st Century](#). And it's what led me to become one of the founding members of the Better Way network, in which we're

committed to open-ended dialogue on a better future for public services, while all willing to admit we don't have any clever answers yet. It feels like the right way forward to me, and if my experience so far is anything to go by, then whatever role or situation you find yourself in, doing what you feel is right, even if you think it's likely to fail, stands the greatest chance of offering the kind of leadership our sector needs right now.

Kathy Evans became CEO of [Children England](#) in April 2013 with a career background spanning counselling and social care practice, policy, research and campaign roles in the voluntary sector – always with a focus on children and young people. Kathy is also a Humanist celebrant for weddings and baby naming.

'HOLISTIC SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP' TO DELIVER BETTER OUTCOMES



IDEAS FROM CATE NEWNES-SMITH

I believe that the guiding principle for me as a voluntary sector leader should be 'What is best for young people?' and not 'What is best for the third sector or my charity?' This may seem obvious, but various structural and cultural factors work against this and it can be harder to put into practice than it first seems.

When I first attended the Surrey Safeguarding Children Board I was puzzled about what people expected of me. As CEO of a connection and collaboration charity, I was there to represent the third sector but they weren't talking about the third sector. The agenda was about Serious Case Reviews and other issues that didn't seem relevant to me. Gradually, however, I started to spot opportunities where the third sector should perhaps be informed or involved. I would put up my hand and say 'What about the third sector?' It became a running

joke between me and the Chair that when I put up my hand she wouldn't even need me to speak she would know what I was going to ask.

'I began to understand my role differently – to improve whole system delivery'

Over time I gained confidence and began to see a significant role for me and it wasn't just about representing the third sector – which I see now was a partisan and unhelpful approach to the situation. Thanks to being invited to join a small group of senior public sector leaders who meet regularly to build trust, discuss problems and develop new ways of working, I began to understand my role differently: my goal at the Safeguarding board and in other forums is now to work with my colleagues as co-leaders to improve the whole system delivery of outcomes for children and young

people. For want of a better phrase, I call this 'systems leadership' (although I have had feedback from people from outside of the social care/health/charity world that this is baffling to them, so I continue to seek a better phrase). This does not mean that I have abandoned the third sector, far from it. I passionately believe that young people are best served if the third sector plays a bigger role, but expansionism must never be my guiding principle.

Existing silo working within public and charity organisations leads to each organisation attempting to solve one or two problems in a person's life. Families with a number of 'needs' are often expected to work with an 'expert' on each of their 'needs'. Systems leadership takes a broader view of beneficiaries' lives: seeing the whole person and offering help that builds on their strengths and interests and the opportunities around them. The help then comes in a much wider form than just services: community development, peer support, friendship, etc which provide a sense of purpose, hope, contribution, and more.

A key part of this is connecting people and bringing different organisations together. Systems

leaders don't say 'how can my organisation solve this problem?' they say 'who can we collaborate with to understand our beneficiaries' lives, including their strengths, issues and opportunities?' Of course, the beneficiaries must be valued, respected stakeholders in this process.

One of the barriers to collaborative working is born from a positive value: we are brought up to be loyal to organisations. However, loyalty to an organisation or sector must not take priority over doing the right thing for beneficiaries. Each and every person in the system needs to take responsibility for putting children and young people first, even if this means 'betraying' their organisation.

I recently became concerned that, due to our responses to external factors including funding cuts, we were starting to compete with another charity whom we had previously worked alongside. I approached the CEO, whom I liked and respected, to have a conversation about how we can collaborate rather than compete. It was a highly fruitful discussion and hopefully, a new interesting initiative will result.

'We need a whole community response'

No sector has a monopoly on helping and we need a whole community response to many issues. During last winter's snow, Deliveroo encouraged its drivers to contact a homeless charity if they spotted a homeless person on the streets. Women's Aid are training hairdressers and butchers to spot the signs of Domestic Abuse in their clientele and give gentle, appropriate responses.

It's early days and I can't prove that the whole systems approach is making a difference yet. However it feels right. Here are my suggestions towards developing 'holistic systems leadership':

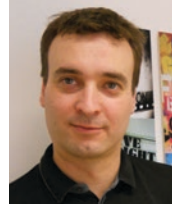
1. Start by understanding the lives of people you want to serve in conjunction with other agencies (banning the word 'service' from the conversation!).
2. Work together to set a 'Big Hairly Audacious Goal' and seek help from unusual places to achieve that goal. An example: 'our aim is for Surrey to become a great place for young people with

SEND (special educational needs and disability) to find and keep employment.'

3. If you are competing with another organisation, approach the leader to discuss how you can shift paradigms so that you collaborate around a shared goal. Currently your combined social contribution may be one plus one makes one. Can you make one plus one makes three together?
4. In every decision you take, ask yourself whether you are putting the beneficiaries first or your organisation?
5. Play a networking and connection role – it doesn't matter whether it is in your job description, always look out for opportunities to connect people.

Cate Newnes-Smith is CEO of [Surrey Youth Focus](#), a connection and collaboration charity working to improve the lives of young people in Surrey. Cate has extensive experience in both the private sector and charities. Cate loves her family, being out in the countryside, connecting with friends old and new, finding out about new social ideas and playing hockey.

COMPLEXITY DEMANDS COLLABORATION AND A NEW PARADIGM THAT SUPPORTS THIS



IDEAS FROM TOBY LOWE

Almost all social interventions are complex. There are three key reasons for this: issues, people and systems are all complex, but we often pretend otherwise. We need 'trust based' funding and alliance contracting to recognise this.

Issues are complex: First, the issues with which social interventions are typically concerned are complex, in that they are the result of multiple, intertwined factors. We can see this in the amazing systems map of obesity, produced by the UK Government in 2007. It maps the 108 different factors, and the relationships between them, that lead to a person being obese (or not).

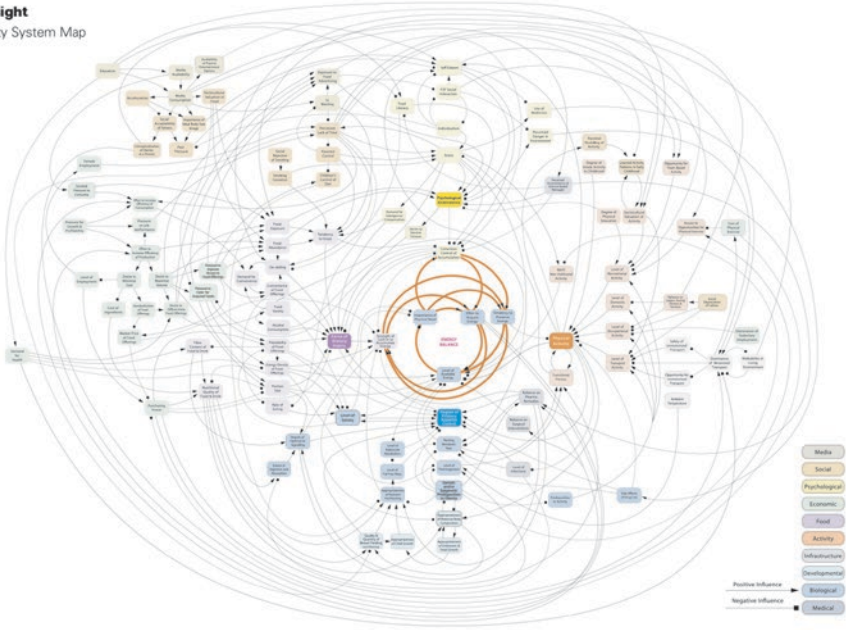
People are complex: We now routinely use the language of 'complex needs' and apply it to groups of people who seem to have

particularly difficult combinations of problems. Understanding complex needs is important, but this can mask a deeper truth. From the perspective of seeking to create positive outcomes in the world, all people's lives are complex. What makes my life meaningful to me is different than what makes your life meaningful to you. Consequently, what an outcome like obesity (for example) looks like for me will be different than for you.

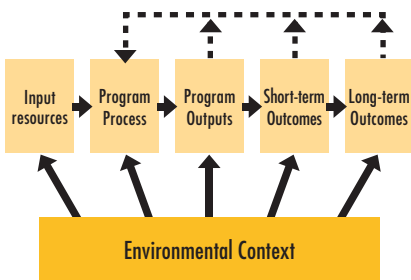
'For too long we have tried to ignore this complexity'

Systems are complex: A wide range of people, organisations and relationships contribute to creating the outcomes that people experience in their lives – from informal relationships of friends and family, through to a whole range of services and other interventions.

Foresight
Obesity System Map



Vandenbroeck, P., Goossens, J. and Clemens, M. (2007), Foresight Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Building the Obesity System Map, London: Government Office for Science, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295153/07-1177-obesity-system-atlas.pdf



The false model of linear processes

Schalock, R. L. and Bonham, G. S. (2003), Measuring outcomes and managing for results, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 26, 4: 229–35.

What all of the above tells us is that our work is inescapably complex. For too long we have tried to ignore this complexity and pretend that the work is simple. We have pretended that standardised proxy measures can represent the complexity of people’s lives. And we have pretended that outcomes are made by linear processes of change which can be modelled as shown here.

'Complexity requires collaboration'

Collaboration is a necessary response, if we want to help people's lives to improve.

The key message is that positive outcomes aren't 'delivered' by interventions or services. Systems produce outcomes. And they do so in irreducibly unpredictable ways – because the range of factors interacting with each other produce emergent outcomes which cannot be predicted in advance, and which cannot be controlled by any single person or organisation.

We must nurture the health of these systems so that they are more likely to produce positive outcomes than not. In particular, it is the job of those who have responsibility for places and services – such as public and voluntary sector leaders and charitable funders – to take responsibility and ensure that the actors in these systems – the people and organisations who live, work and volunteer within them – can work effectively together to respond collaboratively to the particular strengths and needs of each person and community.

'A Whole New World'

Last year, we undertook research with a range of charitable funders and public sector commissioners to explore what they can do to make this real. What we found was an emerging new paradigm – a different way of thinking and acting – for funding and commissioning. We called this 'A Whole New World'.

The key elements of this new world are:

- **Intrinsic Motivation.** Funders and commissioners working in this complexity-informed way recognise that the people who do this work are intrinsically motivated to do so. They do not require extrinsic motivation – external rewards and punishments – to be motivated to do a good job.
- **Learning drives improvement.** This shift opens up space for learning to be the engine of performance improvement, rather than relying on vertical accountability (your boss watching over you) to create improvement. Funders, commissioners and delivery

organisations who work in this way create learning environments: they create cultures in which groups of practitioners reflect together, they create 'positive error cultures' in which people are able to talk openly with their peers about mistakes and uncertainties and improve their capacity to make difficult judgements in situations of uncertainty. And they use measurement to learn and improve, rather than to 'demonstrate their effectiveness'.

- **Nurturing system health.**

Finally, to improve the health of the system they invest in networks and information sharing mechanisms, helping the actors in the system to communicate and co-ordinate their work. And beyond the structures, they invest in nurturing trust – building positive relationships between the actors in those systems, so that the communication is authentic, honest and meaningful.

What this looks like in practice: trust-based funding and alliance contracting: Trust is central to this new paradigm. Charitable funders describe their practice as 'trust-based funding'. This means funding given without KPIs or other performance targets – unrestricted funding which

allows organisations to respond to the rapidly changing environments in which they work, and which allows those organisations to provide the bespoke responses to each person and communities particular strengths and needs. They find the organisations they can trust to navigate the complexity of people and systems effectively. They find the organisations they trust to do the right thing when the world changes – because the world will change.

'Funders trust organisations who collaborate well'

Key to this paradigm is therefore finding out what are good reasons for funders and fundees to trust one another. What funders said was that they trust organisations who collaborate well, who know what role they play in wider systems, organisations who learn well, and who use evidence to inform their practice.

Commissioners are also using 'alliance contracting' as a way of distributing resources – allocating resources to networks of collaborating organisations and trusting them to use these resources well. In order to enable adaptive responses to the ever-changing complexity of the work, commissioners don't use KPIs or other

targets. Instead they support the organisations to use measurement as a way to reflect on and improve their practice and they hold the organisations they fund accountable for learning and improving.

A growing movement: Over 300 funders, commissioners and delivery organisations have already said they would like to join a Community of Practice where they can explore how to work in this way together. You can begin to see what they're talking about at <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/tobyloew/2018/01/10/a-whole-new-world-is-beginning-to-take-shape/>. And if you would like to find out more, you can sign up to receive further information at <http://eepurl.com/dgg3Lr>. And if you're already working in this way, or would like to start, we've just

started an action-research project which will help us to answer some of the key 'how do we do this?' questions. These include: 'how does accountability work, if we can't hold organisations accountable for results?', 'what are good reasons for trust?' and 'what does a healthy system look like, and how do we know if we've got one?' Drop me a line if you'd like to be part of this.

Toby Lowe is a Senior Research Fellow at Newcastle University Business School, who is helping to create a new complexity-informed paradigm for the funding, commissioning and delivery of social interventions – helping organisations to escape from the shackles of the failing New Public Management approach. He's also an ex voluntary sector Chief Executive, and an over-enthusiastic dancer.

THE ROLE OF CONNECTORS IN CREATING COLLABORATION



IDEAS FROM AUDREY THOMPSON

Is collaboration about including everyone, whatever their background or ability, being kind and caring and sharing, ideas, resources, workload and leadership? Is it also hard to put into practice? My life experience of 83 years says yes it is, and the key to making it happen is a funded 'connector' role.

Competition has its place in certain situations but can be unkind, exclusive, and a 'survival of the fittest' attitude, without regard for the feelings or the wellbeing of those who for various reasons cannot overcome or cope with some of life's problems.

My first experience of being a connector was back in 1970 in the Doncaster area. When a new school was built in Arksey and the old school became the Youth Club, I was appointed Leader-in-Charge, paid for two nights a week. With the help of

the community it soon developed into a youth and community centre used by all age groups in the community, with a collaborative spirit and young people very much in the lead.

In 1973, on the basis of my previous work, I was asked to work in the mining community of New Village, based at the primary school where I had attended as a child. The role was new and was to work with young people to create family activities after school, especially for those within the catchment area of the secondary school. My brief as a tutor was 'to develop more opportunities for all from the 'cradle to the grave', with the emphasis on informal/social education especially with 'hard to reach' people in the community. A new post was also created in Toll Bar for the youth leader to work with that community. Toll Bar and New Village were and still are areas of high deprivation.

Many great things happened by working in collaboration and partnership with all the community in and out of school. We established a community association that initiated many projects and educational opportunities working with the Northern College at Barnsley. But in 1974, as a result of a local government reorganisation and a change of officers and policies in education, the funding came to an end. One of the biggest barriers to change is the lack of continuity by policy makers mainly in governments and councils, especially in education. However no matter what changes there are communities still remain and have to find ways of changing or coping with whatever happens.

‘In some areas, a connector role is essential to increase social mobility and opportunities’

In some areas, this kind of connector role is essential for collaboration between different agencies, groups and individuals in order to work together in partnership to increase social mobility and make more opportunities for all, wherever they are in life.

Four years ago I became a volunteer/Director of the Bentley Area Community Library, staffed by

volunteers. The last four years have not been easy, but with a lot of information from the Carnegie UK Trust and the Community Managed Libraries Peer Network, some good volunteers, council workers, councillors, NHS support and Manna Community CIC and more, we have created a building where lots of people feel welcome and can find support for housing and debt, as well as personal counselling. The library also offers lots of leisure groups helping to combat isolation, support groups for carers, activities for people suffering from Alzheimer’s, well being groups, children’s activities, and WEA literacy classes, to name a few. We also have family well-being days, and primary school displays. The library has become a Hub, a contact point with information, contacts, and resources, and a place of welcome shared with the wider community.

‘I’ve experienced that support in the past, but also seen it taken away’

Not everything happens in the library!!! But it can be a springboard and connector in the wider area and is a vivid example of collaboration in action. We have convinced some, but not all, that a change is needed and is working. But unless the role of the connector is seen as a professional, paid, supported

role working in and alongside the Education department in the structure of Doncaster council, we will not achieve change for the people who really need it. I've experienced that support in the past, but also seen it taken away, which is why we are still asking the same questions.

Over the last fifty years, many people including myself have produced evidence across the country and the world, that new ways of working have to be found

and people have to change their thinking and their ways if we are to have a fairer society. The connector role is key to collaboration.

Audrey Thompson was born in 1935, her father was a miner, she was married in 1954 and her husband died in 2003. She has five children and thirteen grandchildren. She worked for Doncaster Council as a Youth/Community/Social Education worker. She is currently a volunteer/Director of Bentley Library. Her hobbies include: gardening, textile and other crafts and listening to music.

'COMPANY CITIZEN SEEKS PARTNER FOR MUTUAL ADVANTAGE'



CASE STUDIES FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR BY TOM LEVITT

Once upon a time big companies did CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). It subtly reminded employees that they were team members whilst ticking a few philanthropy boxes and was delivered by – well, that didn't really matter. Maybe volunteers, perhaps a dedicated department with no other role in the company, rarely the HR people. And adopting a 'Charity of the Year' allowed the company's goodness to be more widely appreciated; charities liked it because it was easier to get money from a new source each year than wring it out of an old one. For them, raising money was, mostly, what it was all about.

Things have changed.

First, some companies realised that their choice of charity partner was significant: the right choice

signposted the purpose and mission of the business far more than did random fluffy animals, well-known diseases or distant children, causes that polls of employees were prone to promote. Second, they realised that a year was not long enough to build a proper relationship or learn from missed opportunities. And third, cash was not necessarily king: time and skills could be at least as much appreciated as money when appropriately deployed.

This meant that new ideas could take root:

- Flexibility, rather than the rigid 'corporate volunteering day', was more attractive both to charities and to participating employees.
- As sceptics pointed out, employee volunteers were not really volunteers: they were being paid whilst working alongside

those 'doing it for nothing'. It was the company, not the individuals, that was contributing its time and skills.

- Integrating CSR into the mainstream operation of the company, rather than treating it as an optional extra, could benefit the company.

'A less altruistic, possibly more honest approach'

This new generation of company citizens talked of 'purpose', 'mission' and 'partnership', leading to a less altruistic, possibly more honest approach: there was nothing wrong with the company profiting indirectly from its engagement with good causes. Indeed, this justifies any investment made in the process.

So, we've moved from employees taking initiatives to sponsor each other, bake cakes and ride bikes for money, through communal days out for painting or gardening, through providing the skills that charities and community groups need – right through to a company expressing its own mission and purpose through a strategic approach to its relationship with the community.

'Health at Work' is a multifaceted British Heart Foundation (BHF)

campaign. Companies that engage with it gain from reduced sickness absence, higher morale, better team building and reduced early retirement on illness grounds. The return on investment for a workplace health strategy can be as much as 34:1 based on reducing absenteeism, accidents and staff turnover and the resulting improvement in productivity. Participating companies also report better employee engagement and internal communications.

At Asda's distribution centre in Leicestershire BHF promotes its Workplace Wellbeing Charter. Here, on-site gym membership costs employees £3 per month and the company supports free fruit days, helps employees buy bicycles, offers smoking cessation clinics and health checks and even stages a 'coast-to-coast' static cycle event to raise money for BHF. The Asda scheme initially reduced absenteeism by 1.5 per cent – worth £200,000 to the company, a massive return on a £20,000 investment, in a single year.

Four hundred employers and 10,000 individuals have backed the Time to Change pledge. Led by charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness it's a commitment to change attitudes and risks around mental health. The charities help create bespoke

workplace plans including events to support mental health Champions. Longstanding supporters include Transport for London, Imperial College, E.ON, Anglian Water and Lloyds Bank. A manager in a big white-collar company noted that the main cause of death in adult males under forty is suicide. He said: 'Ours is a stressful business and our median employee is a twenty-nine year old male; we need to manage them carefully.'

'A shift away from cash and towards skills and expertise'

In America the Dell Foundation, a major source of philanthropic funding, has identified a significant shift in their charity partners' needs, away from cash and towards skills and expertise. They describe the shift as from capital to competence, intervention to innovation, coordination to collaboration and short-term fix to long-term involvement. Given a choice between a \$100,000 gift and an equivalent value in counselling, skilled volunteering or access to decision-makers only four in ten of Dell's 700 partner NGOs,

worldwide, would today choose cash. Just four years earlier that figure was seven in ten.

Collaboration between charities and businesses has always existed and is ever evolving. No longer is it acceptable for corporates to write cheques to hide their misdemeanours, boost short-term sales or please the apocryphal chairman's wife; one way traffic is, in many cases, over. What's happening today in the best cross-sector partnerships between the private and voluntary sectors is mutual respect and common advantage, longer-term relationships based on shared interests and complementary skills.

Unlike the 'here today, gone tomorrow' era of the Charity of the Year, this is a truly sustainable development.

Since 2010 Tom Levitt, a former Labour MP, has been a writer and consultant on responsible business, with clients of all sizes in all sectors. His latest book, *The Company Citizen: Good for Business, Planet, Nation and Community*, was published early in 2018.

TOWARD SHARED LEADERSHIP

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In discussions in the London cells in the second half of last year, we started to talk about a new model of leadership to deliver a Better Way. Much of what we identified came down to collaboration, or ‘shared leadership’.

‘A command and control model of leadership is deeply embedded’

A command and control model of leadership is deeply culturally embedded in Britain, including in the public and social sectors, we concluded. Leaders are expected to focus on the management of their agencies and on the delivery of specified outputs and outcomes, treating their organisations like industrial production units, rather than acting as change agents. CEOs feel under pressure to conform to (gendered) stereotypes and adopt behaviours that are neither natural nor effective. Competition between leaders, rather than collaboration, is ingrained.

However, many of the issues facing society cannot be solved by a single agency, or even by a number of

organisations working together. There are many factors affecting health and well-being, for example. A complex system of influences and organisations are important and individuals and communities are critical actors.

The social sector is also not exercising a sufficiently strong thought leadership role in society, tending to comment on the agendas set by others in order to seek marginal changes, rather than pointing out fundamental problems in the system and arguing for paradigm shifts. It tends to talk politics, rather than about what really matters to people.

What is needed is a bigger scale of ambition and more collaboration and shared leadership.

‘Shared leadership is about exercising influence and empowering others to become leaders too’

Shared leadership is not something simply exercised by people at the top of organisations, we concluded. It is about exercising *influence* and happens when others choose to

follow you, not because of a job title. This is not about becoming a 'saviour' or a 'guru' but about empowering others to become leaders too.

This kind of leadership is exercised in collaboration and demonstrates the generous qualities which can be summarised as 'love'. Qualities of respect, kindness, generosity, nurturing, enabling and empowering are all important. Such leadership is more about demonstrating the right behaviour and values than setting specific goals from on high. In one organisation, for example, everyone is encouraged to exercise 'nine habits', which include hope and love, and to attend workshops with a mix of people at different levels of the organisation to explore how to put these qualities into practice.

'Shared leadership is far more effective than conventional models in relation to so-called complex issues'

The evidence points to shared leadership being far more effective than conventional models in relation to so-called complex issues, as opposed to 'complicated' and 'simple' ones. These distinctions are drawn from science, which distinguishes between systems that may be *complicated*, such as computers, but are man-made and

systems that are so *complex* that we will probably never fully understand them, such as the human brain or a rain forest. Command and control forms of leadership have their place in relation to simple and even complicated problems and this is an important message. Any organisation is likely to face a mix but in complex situations, leadership is about getting the conditions right for everyone involved to be able to work with complexity. This is achieved, for example, through the creation of networks within and across organisations, and showing leadership by demonstrating core values rather than giving instructions or setting precise goals. It is recognised that the final outcome may be unknowable when the work starts.

Obstacles to shared leadership:

- Lip-service is often given to shared leadership but change will not happen unless it is shown that it works and will be recognised and rewarded.
- Network-orientated leaders often find it hard to access circles of power and for their voices to be heard.
- The versions of shared leadership tried out in the collectives of

the 1970s and 80s were often chaotic and often led to factional dominance.

- Community development, including community organising, is intended to grow bottom-up leadership but there is a danger that citizens themselves end up adopting command and control leadership models.
- Often people do not see themselves as leaders and do not recognise the power and resources available to them. They lack self-efficacy.

As well as making the case for shared leadership, we need to have a better sense of what it means in practice and how best to embed and promote it.

‘Systems change brings real change, not individual leaders’

Better Way members recognised that leadership does not work in isolation. Culture and systems are important too. Indeed one member had come to the conclusion that it is systems change that brings real change, not individual leaders. The Sheffield Microsystem Coaching Academy, for example, trains coaches to work in the health service to redesign services, involving patients in the process. A RSA report identified three forms of power important to leadership – personal agency; the power of shared values and norms; and the hierarchical power of expertise.

Context matters too. What might work in a start up industry would not work in the culture of the public sector.

MASS PARTICIPATION IS BETTER THAN CENTRALISED POWER

Power is concentrated in the hands of too few people. More decisions should be made by larger groups of people with a shared interest or expertise in the subject, starting with those whose voices have not been heard: 'no decisions about us without us'. Moreover, public agencies, charities and businesses achieve most when they move away from command and control by the few and stimulate the resourcefulness of the many.

ENGAGING DIVERSE VOICES IN MASS PARTICIPATION: THE SOCIAL INNOVATION EXCHANGE



A CASE STUDY BY SO JUNG RIM

I started working in this field known as 'social innovation' at the Hope Institute, a think-and-do tank in South Korea, with the motto 'I hope, therefore, I am'. I was drawn to the Complaint Choir, a participatory project organised by the Hope Institute, which invited people to complain about any issues they want to talk about and then turn them into a song, which everyone sings together at the final concert.

Korea was going through turbulent times in the 1980s. As a child, I remember going into the city with my parents and seeing mass street demonstrations against the authoritarian regime in Seoul – my parents always apprehensive that they would lose me and my brother in the busy streets. I remember the protests and rallies in single file, people with the same colour ribbons around their forehead, shouting the same words – it seemed like a very orderly gathering with a centralised way of working.

'The Complaint Choir enabled individual dissent'

The Complaint Choir represented something different and new for me. It showed individual dissent and in a creative way. The complaints were diverse, from women complaining how the standard subway handles were all standardised to average male height, young people complaining about pressures to achieve academic success to mums complaining about lack of green spaces or places to breastfeed.

In order to turn complaints into real action, we ran more projects at the Hope Institute such as the Social Invention Competition and Social Designer School that enabled citizens to participate and co-create solutions to the challenges they were facing. We saw social innovation as an end as well as means.

The idea of ‘social innovation’ really took off in Korea, especially in Seoul City, when the founder of the Hope Institute, Wonsoon Park, became the Mayor of Seoul in 2011. With a strong mandate from this ‘social innovation mayor’, Seoul City created more funding, spaces, and projects for social innovation. At the heart of the social innovation movement led by Seoul City was the idea of participatory democracy, opening up different spaces and ways for citizens to contribute to decision-making.

‘The participatory process could distribute power unequally, to those who are more vocal and have resources to engage’

It would seem that the Seoul story is one of success but I think we are at a very critical moment in our social innovation movement. While the general pathways for mass participation have increased, I think one of the unintended oversights has been around the continuous effort to engage with the most vulnerable population in our society who are generally left behind. Who gets to participate? Generally, people with time and resources. The participatory channels intend to decentralise power, however, we must recognise that this is not a neutral process. The power distributed could be

very unequal. The agenda that is discussed through participatory process could be the agenda of a limited section of the society, who are more vocal or has the time and resources to engage.

I recently had a call with an activist friend working at a Korean women’s rights organization, supporting young people who are victims of sexual exploitation – the ‘hard to reach’ groups with complex needs. She told me that she has visited social innovation hub spaces (which offer support and resources for social innovation projects) in Seoul. However, it was difficult for her to find a way to engage. She could not find a way to connect the ‘heaviness’ of her work, filled with stories of abuse and exploitation, with the ‘lightness’ of the space. I imagine that the young people she works with rarely engage with social innovation spaces in Seoul.

Frances Westley notes, ‘The capacity of any society to create a steady flow of social innovations, particularly those which re-engage vulnerable populations, is an important contributor to overall social and ecological resilience.’ The challenge is to stay open and continue to create ways to bring in people that are excluded – the most vulnerable in our society. This

diversity is not something that is just a 'nice to have' or a 'right thing to do'. If we fail to do so, we risk losing valuable viewpoints and contributions of these excluded people. We risk being less resilient as a society as a whole.

Fast forward a few years and I currently work at the Social Innovation Exchange in the UK and we are taking the Unusual Suspects Festival to Seoul this year. The festival is a platform to bring together diverse voices in society to craft solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges.

'At SIX, it's our job to bring together an unusual mix of voices, to create safe spaces to provide different perspectives'

It's our job to bring together an unusual mix of voices and collaborators. We act as translators or mediators to give people the autonomy to talk to each other, build relationships and collaboration, shape the agenda and have new conversations. It's our job to create safe spaces for people like my friend and the young people she works with to engage and provide different perspectives and find shared meaning and action forward with others.

So Jung Rim works at [SIX](#), the worldwide social innovation exchange and is part of [SPREAD-i](#), a collaborative team spreading inspiration and knowledge between Asia and Europe. So Jung is passionate about surfacing, exchanging and co-creating knowledge and collaboration for social change by bringing different groups of people and organisations together.

'MASS PARTICIPATION IS ABOUT MASS ENJOYMENT': THE SELBY CENTRE IN TOTTENHAM



A CASE STUDY BY SONA MAHTANI

We know instinctively that there is a better way to organise society, and occasionally come across examples that really reflect that in practice. For me, the Selby Centre is such an example, with its motto of 'Many Cultures, One Community'. A multi-purpose community centre set in dowdy 1960s school buildings. Peel back the onion, you'll find it is a dynamic social action hub run by the Selby Trust, a registered charity. It generates £1 million annually, covers our main bills, including salaries for twenty local staff from earned income.

We reach over 173,000 people annually and attracted 797 volunteers from twenty-eight firms in 2017. Open eighteen hours a day, 7 days a week, the Centre brings in 130+ community groups, charities, sports clubs, community businesses, faith groups, employment support

agencies, learning providers and skills agencies. Most are community led, by people often from the same diverse communities they seek to support. Norwegian, Japanese, German, Urdu, Somali, Arabic, Twi, Caribbean Patois, Malayalam and English speakers feel welcome at our reception desk, reflecting a long history of open arms to refugees and migrants in Tottenham.

Over thirty years, the Centre's tenants, often small grassroots groups, have collectively raised over £35 million, spent primarily on improving local lives and standards. Under one roof, there is capacity and key community services in health, well-being, youth, learning and employment. This represents an accumulated community investment in the local Tottenham area and its residents.

'A wedding banqueting hall, an Olympic sized boxing ring, the Ding Dong play bus, a global garden.'

Enter one set of double doors to get married in a salubrious wedding banqueting hall, before going into a boxing club with an Olympic sized ring. If you're not careful, you'll find yourself on the Ding Dong play bus in a children's party or a strategic away day in our global garden or going upstairs to learn a skill or fifty. It feels more strategic, more impactful and energising somehow which only comes from being where it really matters – on the ground, working with people and finding that they hold the answers to all those wicked problems. And boy is the food good!

For me, Selby has been the gift that has never really stopped giving, finding me love, endless amusement and satisfaction in all sorts of ways. This long arc started with me offering to work on an HIV and AIDS project promoting safe sex messages to young people in a cartoon project that involved us rampantly sexually active youngsters leading and shaping the project from beginning to end. After eighteen months, my boss phoned the Head of HIV and AIDS work, and insisted he give 'this young girl' a reference. This guy's reputation as a referee got me the interview at London Lighthouse and the rest is history.

I've been lucky to find work that has fed and stretched my brain, changed my personality. I've seen the same happen to many people – literally thousands of lives transformed amongst North London's residents over a thirty-year history. Not like a sausage machine, but by creating a platform for community organisers to come together, community organisations and networks to form, finding people jobs and opportunities, sharing cultures, languages, skills that strengthen all our hands in surviving and becoming an established part of British society.

The Selby Centre is a focal point of devolved or distributed power, tucked away on a council estate. It is also the third largest concentration of employment in Tottenham, collectively employing over 200 staff in an area lacking in big business and well-known for a high concentration of small businesses, apart from one very famous football club and our local Council.

Mass participation is about mass enjoyment. Mohamed, one of our community organisers, a young Somali father of four, said in one of those 'theory of change' sessions, to the amusement of his colleagues, that 'coming to work did not feel like work!' Pure heresy! How did we manage to instigate joy in one of

the country's most deprived areas – Tottenham?! We're not in Finland you know – where there's childcare support, help for the young, the old and new parents, benefits systems that work and housing? Erm.... that's what we do have here.

The Centre – which dates back to 1996 – was made possible by a community committed to diversity and a local authority that provided the building and support. It's founded on a belief that people can do a lot themselves and the Centre frees people to find jobs, get advice, learn new skills and put back into society and the state's coffers locally and nationally. It's a living demonstration that mass participation – or community development as we call it – *is* better than centralised power.

'The simple act of bringing people together unleashes creativity, opportunity and energy people create themselves'

Creating these informal havens in a largely unforgiving city by the simple act of bringing people together unleashes creativity, opportunity and energy people create themselves. It's the answer, let's do more of it and build better facilities to do it in that give credit to our communities and our work.

Sona is the Chief Executive of the [Selby Trust](#) following a period as a consultant, network manager and project manager. Her career in the voluntary sector spans thirty years and has involved working in sectors such as homelessness, HIV and AIDs support, capacity building in area regeneration, and community asset management.

FOOD POWER: TACKLING FOOD POVERTY THROUGH EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE TO SAY WHAT THEY WANT



A CASE STUDY BY SIMON SHAW

The Food Power programme works with a network of approximately fifty alliances or networks developing preventative and long-term responses to food poverty. The programme is delivered by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming and Church Action on Poverty and funded by the National Lottery. The programme includes a particular focus on involving experts by experience at a strategic level. In this series of three interviews, some of those involved in the programme explore what this really means.

1. **Simon Shaw, Food Power Programme Coordinator and Better Way London cell member in conversation with Ben Pearson, Food Power Involvement Officer**

SS: What is your approach to involvement of experts by experience? Are you trying something new or different?

BP: I think often in the food poverty sector those with lived experience of food poverty are seen as 'service users' or 'participants'. We are trying to embed a different approach so that individuals have meaningful roles as experts with strategic influence. Co-design and co-delivery are central to involving experts by experience, empowering them from the very start in designing the pilot projects to ensure the methodology and tools used are engaging for people. For example, young people have designed empowerment exchanges and delivered workshops to other children and young people on the issues they

have identified and using the tools they enjoy. Asylum seekers and refugees in Luton will use food and eating together as a catalyst for conversation and storytelling. Young people and older people in rural Lancashire will co-design tools with Imagination Lancaster to allow them to listen to each other and then involve food producers. In Hull creative activities with parents and young children will capture their own experiences.

SS: What can be the benefits of involving experts by experience to shape a response to food poverty?

‘Experts by experience are incredibly resilient’

BP: Without wishing to generalise I find that experts by experience are incredibly resilient, they know what’s worked and what hasn’t worked, understanding at a grassroots level the impact services and strategies have on their daily lives. It’s difficult, if not impossible, for those who haven’t lived through poverty to truly understand the emotions, both good and bad, that are experienced on a daily basis. These emotions will influence people’s decisions, where they will and won’t go for support and what they will and won’t eat. It’s also important to remember the assets, such as knowledge and skills that those living in food poverty have.

Empowering individuals to share these at both a practical and strategic level is important.

SS: How have you overcome any challenges?

BP: The biggest challenge in involving experts has been around the language and terminology we use around food poverty. Many of those ‘living it’ don’t identify with it, they are ‘struggling’, ‘coping’, living like their parents and grandparents or in a community with many others in the same situation: it’s part of their daily lives. It’s important to remember these are all individuals; their identities aren’t defined by poverty. So when recruiting or working with those who could be involved as experts it’s choosing the right language, starting the conversation with food, not poverty and talking about access and affordability, the food people like and want to eat. It usually means working closely with partner organisations which have trusting relationships with people and can help to get them on board. It’s also important to be flexible; often the adversities people face means attending a meeting or event isn’t straightforward. Providing childcare and travel expenses can overcome some of these barriers, but also exploring other ways for people to communicate and contribute.

SS: How do you encourage people to participate when some may feel that they can't make a difference?

BP: People will sometimes feel that they can't make any significant impact on their own. I think it's about identifying small changes they can make in their community to start with; this is often what people will most relate to or be most passionate about. It's really important to feed back to people what difference their contribution has made to ensure that they appreciate this. Other benefits include meeting like-minded individuals with similar experiences, amplifying their voices, and to feel it's okay to challenge the decisions of professionals who may not have lived experience. People already involved have said how just by being identified as an expert – in itself – is empowering.

2. Ben Pearson in conversation with Gillian Beeley, Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance

BP: What value has involving those with lived experience of food poverty brought to Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance?

GB: I think the involvement of the young people and observing their workshops has been really quite salutary on two levels. Firstly that they don't necessarily recognise

what food poverty is, and secondly they then don't really see it applying to themselves. Because the young people are talking about it, it means that when they present at our food alliance meetings it has more resonance and its making people think more widely from just food parcels and crisis food. It's really helped to inform where the priorities need to be, moving away from crisis food to actually cooking and eating, using food as a catalyst for building communities and improving family dynamics is really important. The challenge now for me is how something that in essence started as a public health eat well strategy now gets converted into a whole range of activities that are community driven and will impact on the wellbeing of the communities in Blackburn with Darwen.

BP: How will people with lived experience be increasingly involved in the alliance's work?

GB: It will help us prioritise what the food plan should be about. I'm struggling at the moment calling it a food poverty action plan because it's how you talk about poverty and the stigma attached, and so at the moment I'm calling it a good food plan, good food for all. I think involving those with lived experience will help us prioritise what we do,

but more critically affect how we talk about it and how we deliver or encourage the development of community based responses to food poverty. I think it's challenging when they don't recognise what food poverty is. I think all of us need to be a bit more circumspect. Say for example we try not to talk about the holiday hunger programme in summer; its holiday nurture, because it's more than just food. It's about supporting families through those long holidays; food is the catalyst to bring them in.

BP: How will involving people help develop a preventative response to food poverty?

'A means to live better'

GB: I think by involving those with lived experience and understanding their stories, collecting those stories and converting those into issues that can be campaigned on with those that have the power to make a difference. So for example, it may be about not collecting council tax in one lump if you've missed two payments because you haven't a hope of ever managing that. The more we understand, the more people we can get to talk about food poverty and poverty more generally. Hopefully this will mean politically we are more aware and

we will get rid of a lot of the stigma attached to food poverty. I think it's a really big ask because when people are under pressure then food is just the fuel to keep them going and the *good* food bit tends to be the secondary consideration. By building communities maybe we can have an impact on individuals and those in family units by making food more than just calories to keep you going, but a means to live better.

3. Ben Pearson in conversation with Tia Clarke, young expert by experience, Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance

BP: What value do you think young people bring to tackling food poverty locally?

TC: People are starting to listen more to what we have to say.

BP: Do you feel talking to people with lived experience of food poverty can result in better solutions to tackling it, and if so why?

TC: Because they know how it feels, they're not just guessing and making assumptions of how it is. Some adults are condescending; [young people] just agree with them because they [adults] don't really care. But this feels different, young people open up more to other young people.

BP: How do you think other young people across the UK could be involved?

TC: They need to be empowered, treated like an adult and taken seriously. Then just get involved as much as you can and don't be afraid of giving your own opinions. Get people to listen to you and tell other people about it.

BP: Could you tell me about how you have been involved in Blackburn with Darwen? How do you feel these activities can help prevent food poverty before crisis?

'Empowerment exchanges help us share opinions, making people more aware'

TC: We've designed and run workshops called 'empowerment exchanges' with other young people, people who sometimes don't understand food poverty. The things

we do help them understand more and they share their own opinions, helping adults to understand. People are then more aware of what's happening.

BP: What does 'people power' mean to you?

TC: Empowering people to speak about what they want.

Stories and any resources coming out of Food Power's work will be available here in due course: sustainweb.org/foodpower/.

Simon Shaw is the Food Power Programme Manager, at [Sustain](#): the alliance for better food and farming, which centres on developing local responses to the root causes of food poverty. Simon has worked in both in the third and public sector, influencing policy and practice across a range of areas.

GRENPELL TOWER — WHAT STORIES WILL BE TOLD?

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In July 2017, we spent time talking in our London cells about what Grenfell Tower meant for a Better Way. This note reflects the discussion in our founding cell. We were optimistic about the potential for the shock it created to lead to some positive change, but since then events have been surprisingly slow moving.

We thought that what happened at Grenfell had the power to significantly influence the post-austerity narrative which has just begun to be opened up and it will undoubtedly shape future policy on social housing and possibly public services in important ways. We've been here before, we reflected. We were reminded about *The Story of Baby P* which documented what actually happened but also found that it was the 'political story', rather than the facts, that shaped the changes in social policy that followed, and not necessarily for the good. This is something we think is likely to happen in the case of

Grenfell. We thought we'd like to influence that narrative if we could.

There are clearly many angles to the Grenfell story, with vested interests seeking to skew things in various directions (eg national government wanting to highlight local authority failures). Some elements of what happened will only be clear once the facts are fully established. But what is evident now is that the voices of residents, who had been raising concerns in their building for years, were not heard and their expertise based on lived experience was undervalued.

This is in contrast to what happened at Ronan Point (as documented by Frances Clarke from Community Links [in the Guardian](#)). There, residents and campaigners – aided and amplified by Community Links, an architectural expert and his students and the Evening Standard – managed to get the building tested and eventually demolished, along

with many others like it across the country (though this was only half a success, as wider lessons were not learnt, as demonstrated by the recent tragedy). One of the campaigners in Glasgow remains active to this day, and in Glasgow building standards in tower blocks are apparently higher today.

'The moral of the two stories of Grenfell Tower and Ronan Point was that society would be so much better if we can get the best out of all of us'

The moral of these two stories, we thought, was that society would be so much better if we can get the best out of all of us. What happened after Grenfell does illustrate this to a degree, despite the chaos and terrible weaknesses it also exposed. The many acts of kindness, the breakdown of communication barriers between rich and poor local residents as a result of individual and corporate acts of care, the individual voices that have now been heard in the media, these have all led to insights that before were lacking and new potential alliances. The human right to a safe place to live, which has been lost in the tangle of what looks like weakened regulation and enforcement, limited budgets and possible profiteering, has risen to the surface again.

It is so easy to see the Grenfell story in terms of conflict, eg rich versus poor, state power versus citizen's rights – and there may be justification in this. But we all agreed that this was potentially a 'teachable moment' in which new inclusive alliances could be built, unexpected allies created, and fundamental rights acknowledged and protected. In the face of understandable anger, it is important not to assume that everyone else is the enemy or to assert that one party has a monopoly on the truth: others, also, have insights into what has happened and forensic approaches to establishing the facts are important, alongside the need for empathy and listening to those who have suffered.

'Ronan Point was demolished because of a coalition between those who had expertise through lived experience and experts, academics and the media'

Ronan Point was demolished because of a coalition between those who had expertise through lived experience (eg residents who could smell cooking through the floor from two stories down who knew therefore that any fire could not be fully self-contained, despite 'expert' assurances to the contrary) and experts, academics and the media. If this could have happened when

local residents raised concerns in Grenfell Tower, perhaps the tragedy would have been averted.

It is often true, as Danny Kruger argued in his [Spectator think piece](#) at the time, that change ultimately only happens when one member of the elite persuades the rest of the elite, but such change is far more likely to happen when these kind of coalitions are built and in particular where local people are given power in the debate. This is not a matter of 'giving' people's voices, or enabling them to speak, we thought. People already have voices and in the era of social media have no difficulty expressing that voice. Indeed, the residents of Grenfell Tower were articulate and well informed and had made their points persistently.

The shift needed here is to create cultures and environments in which those voices are heard. Public services and politicians struggle to

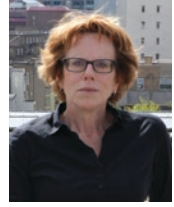
hear within existing structures and constraints and need support and facilitation. Papers like *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* can appear to be the enemy but could be an important force, if harnessed. It is a core role of the voluntary sector to help voices be heard, we observed. But it is not doing this job well, we thought (though this was not the case with Community Links and Ronan Point).

Finally, an interesting point about backlash and Ronan Point. Local people who were homeless in B & Bs were very angry with those who wanted to demolish Ronan Point as they just wanted a roof over their heads and this frustration broke out in destructive ways. This may happen again. Their voice must be heard too if Grenfell is not to result just in widespread demolition in a way that simply fuels the housing crisis and results in currently homeless people being pushed further down the waiting lists.

LOCAL IS BETTER THAN NATIONAL

People need the power to shape the places they live and work in. Stewardship is a shared task but governments should stick to what they do well and stop trying to organise services and community life from the centre, set out aspirations not blueprints, recognise the value of locally based organisations, and only get involved in things which local people can't or won't do by themselves.

LARGE CHARITIES SHOULD CHOOSE NOT TO COMPETE AGAINST LOCAL CHARITIES



IDEAS FROM POLLY NEATE

In my role at Shelter, and previously at Women's Aid, I've had cause to reflect on the Better Way principle 'local is better than national'. It asks organisations to swim against the tide of competitive tendering. It's easy, as a national organisation, to float downstream on that tide, waving goodbye to the small, local organisations left behind. The choices large organisations make in response to local competitive tenders are easy to complicate. But the simplicity of doing the right thing cuts through the complexities we create – that's why it's so challenging. At Women's Aid I heard versions of the story that follows many, many times. That's what convinced me that we need to step up to the challenge as a sector – and we need to do it soon.

This story begins in the 1970s, when feminism was a march into the future. How many activists of

that time would have dreamed the movement would now, in some ways, look back on those days with nostalgia? You couldn't switch on the telly without seeing a woman the butt of the joke. James Bond casually slapped Moneypenny's bottom and the only eyebrow raised was his own. Violence against women was routinely condoned or disbelieved, and rape in marriage was not a crime.

'Women's refuges had to be campaigners as much as helpers, and were often run by survivors'

In this climate, the first women's refuges were born. Often founded by women who had survived abuse themselves, because only they could see domestic abuse amid the routine belittling and dismissal of women's concerns. They had to be campaigners as much as helpers. They begged or squatted buildings,

cobbled together meagre funds from here and there, gathered second-hand furniture and clothes for women and children who fled abuse with nothing. They had to convince all those with power in the local area that a refuge was even needed, that it relied on secrecy, that abusive men would stop at nothing to seek and destroy both their own partner and, often, anyone who stood in the way.

Over the decades, thousands of women's lives were saved. And running a refuge still involved constant fundraising. Then, a more secure funding stream was born. Supporting People, covering all supported housing, offered secure grant income from the local council. It wasn't perfect, but after years of hand-to-mouth existence, it was a relief. It also provided a way of establishing new refuges, and a place at the table among local decision-makers at last.

Finally, domestic abuse and the nature of its impact on women began to be understood. Refuges reached out to prevent future violence, speaking in schools and workplaces, training other agencies, and perhaps most importantly inspiring women who had fled abuse to volunteer and then move into paid work, with many themselves becoming refuge managers.

Roll forward to 2010: Supporting People was ended, at the same time as dramatic year-on-year reductions to local government funding, and the lifting of virtually all diktats on how councils should spend their money.

For many councils, the logical next step was to extend the market principles that had already taken hold in adult social care. The refuge became just one lot in a large tender. Frequently, the women founders were even barred from competing by size rules. In other cases, they competed and lost – usually on price. Between 2010 and 2015, one in six independent refuges were lost. The winners were often larger charities or housing associations, who competed on price with bland assurances that 'service delivery' could continue.

'Is the charity sector about service delivery at the most competitive price? Or is it something more?'

And there's the question at the heart of this principle. Is the charity sector about service delivery at the most competitive price? Or is it something more?

Large organisations who have won refuge contracts, putting those feminist activists out of business in the process, probably didn't see the

future of the charity sector as a factor in their decision to bid, or indeed as their responsibility. But they should. Quite apart from the question of whether the new 'provider' is as good as the old (which of course depends what you measure), there's another question which all of civil society must consider: what sort of sector do we want to be part of, and whose responsibility is it to create it? We had better be happy with the demise of small, local, activist-led organisations, because that's where we are headed.

The twin axioms of the current government – austerity and localism – mean that national lobbying will not achieve protection for local, independent organisations. It can produce a short-term injection of funds – in fact, that's a massive success in this day and age – but it won't level the playing field.

'It's up to the large organisations themselves to rewrite this story.'

So it's up to the large organisations themselves to rewrite this story: to choose not to compete. To choose not to win, even though they can.

At Shelter my perspective has shifted but the picture is still the same. Women fleeing domestic abuse are left with no one who will go that extra mile, who has been through it herself, who has devoted her life to the long and dangerous path to recovery from domestic abuse. There might be a bed available, funded through a generic supported housing contract. And a provider, and a commissioner, who don't even understand what has been lost.

Polly Neate became Shelter's CEO in August 2017, having been the high profile CEO of Women's Aid and, before that, leading all external activities, strategy development and organisational change as Executive Director at Action for Children. She has always worked for social justice, previously as an award-winning journalist.

THE LAMBETH WALK: LESSONS IN POWER SHARING



A CASE STUDY BY RICHARD BRIDGE

Eight years ago, I was invited to be one of the ten commissioners on the Lambeth Council Cooperative Commission. Although originally planned by the then leader of the council, now MP Steve Reed, before the financial crash it was given greater impetus by the time we started with the emerging budget cuts of the then new Coalition government.

Its aspiration was to reimagine how councils could work, believing that greater partnership work with local communities, both of business and residents, could lead to better decisions, better marshalling and allocation of scarce resources, and better outcomes for all.

'What it all really came down to was changing the overall council culture'

Three things stand out in my mind from that time. First, that we deliberately called it Sharing

Power, a new settlement between citizens and the state, wishing to put something on the lid of the tin so to speak that made clear what was inside. Second, is the repeated refrain of the Council Chief Executive in discussions after evidence hearings that he understood what we were trying to achieve but still wasn't clear on how he was going to make it happen. And third, that in my own opinion what it all really came down to, and the answer I think to the Chief Executive's question, was changing the overall council culture, of members and officers alike, from seeing themselves as 'gatekeepers' (whether of power, resources or wisdom) to 'facilitators'.

The Cooperative Council rhetoric remains the stated policy of Lambeth Council and was re-affirmed as recently as 2016 in the Borough Plan: 'We became a Cooperative Council because we wanted to continue

to improve as an organisation, and believed that working more closely with our communities would enable us to improve services and decision-making.....for us, being cooperative is about how we work with our residents, businesses and other partners, involving people in the decisions that affect them and supporting them in improving their communities.'

During 2016-17, I was providing consultancy support to a group of local residents inspired by the original report to come together to take on the Community Asset Transfer of the Carnegie Library in Herne Hill, one of many nationally that councils could no longer afford to manage or sustain the services therein. For five years this group of volunteers had trained, built their capacity, researched, planned, budgeted and gone through the at times interminable processes set up by the council.

Then without any consultation with the group who had spent so long planning to take on this asset, a cross-borough deal with Greenwich Leisure (GLL) was announced to take on a number of Lambeth assets, including Herne Hill Carnegie Library, at peppercorn rents in return for providing certain aspects of library services that the council could no longer fully fund and a rebate

to the council of £1 million on their extant contract with GLL.

All of a sudden the whole basis of the business plan that this group of local residents had been carefully building went out the window. The basement at the building would now be dug out (at the council's expense) to provide room for a gym run commercially by GLL. That the basement should be dug out and used to generate revenue to support the community facilities and library on the ground and first floor had been an idea first proposed by the local resident group. But the council's deal provided for no income from the basement (and other key areas of the ground floor) to any community group taking on the building. A proposed large-scale capital grant application to the Heritage Lottery (which the HL had signified interest in) was immediately vitiated by the council proposing to only lease a part of and not the whole the building to the community group. And all this had been discussed, negotiated and agreed by council officers (and this was pre-eminently an officer plan to resolve budget challenges) without reference to the community group who were already four years into negotiating with the council and who were now shut out from further negotiations with GFL on the grounds of 'commercial sensitivity'.

'This has to be at heart an argument about distributing power differently as well'

I would argue that when we talk of 'local is better than national' we need to understand that this has to be at heart an argument about distributing power differently as well; simply shifting the level at which certain power discussions take place is not in and of itself a sufficient panacea. That we say shifting the locus for certain discussions down the devolution scale (national to local, local to community) is a good thing is exactly because we instinctively feel that at a lower level it will be easier to give power over those decisions to voices and views currently not sufficiently heard and included.

The United Kingdom remains, notwithstanding, the most centralised state in Western Europe. 'Local is better than national' is an appropriate tactical riposte to that. But on its own it leaves untouched the underlying historical reason for that centralisation that is the 'gatekeeper' mentality of much of our country's power elite at whatever level.

Richard Bridge was Director of Enterprise at Community Matters championing local community action and empowerment. He is an active member of his own local community in Waterloo and is a trustee of the [Florence Trust](#) arts organisation. He currently teaches Leadership and Management to Third Sector managers for [Cornel Ltd](#)

PLAYFUL PARTNERSHIPS, LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY



A CASE STUDY BY NICOLA BUTLER

When it comes to play, national and local government both have a role but it is communities who should be right at the heart of services, and that means local providers are often the best. Hackney is a good example of where this is being got right locally. Nationally, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are using partnerships with national organisations to good effect to support play providers locally.

'Hackney is getting it right'

Hackney is one of a small number of local authorities in England that is championing play and child-friendly initiatives, despite cuts from national government.

The partnership in Hackney supports seven thriving adventure playgrounds, fifty play streets, play sessions on estates and in children's centres, specialist support for disabled children, play training and resources for schools, improved playgrounds in local parks and an initiative by local

architects to improve the design of local housing and the public realm to support children's outdoor play. How has this been achieved? And what are the lessons learned for funding and commissioning elsewhere?

The local context: Hackney is a young borough with a quarter of its population under the age of 20. It is a highly diverse, densely populated. the population is growing and it is becoming more affluent. There is significant regeneration and a dramatic improvement in local schools over the last 15 years.

Increasing land prices and regeneration have enabled the Council to partially reduce the effects of austerity. However, persistent inequalities remain with growing child poverty, high levels of obesity and mental health problems.

'High-level council support and local partnerships are critical'

The Labour leadership of Hackney has given long term, high-level political support to play.

Play services are seen locally as a vote winner – something that people enjoy and that helps deliver Council priorities including: community cohesion, child health and wellbeing, reductions in car use, liveability, early intervention and help for families and ultimately quality of life.

The Mayor and councillors are often to be seen joining in with a bit of skipping or hopscotch.

The 2018 Hackney Labour Manifesto commits Hackney to becoming a Child Friendly Borough and supporting local adventure playgrounds, street play and play in parks and public spaces. The Council has appointed a Cabinet member for Families, Early Years and Play – taking the play brief up to Cabinet level for the first time.

The Council's approach to grant funding and commissioning of play services is based on a strong shared vision between council and voluntary sector. Commissioning has been delivered by Council Officers who have experience of delivering voluntary sector play and youth services themselves. They understand the challenges and opportunities

and are able to provide meaningful advice, challenge and capacity building support. The Council funds a play providers' network bringing together local statutory and voluntary sector play services to share good practice and support each other. Local VCS play organisations are invited to participate in meetings about strategic objectives including on childhood obesity and community reassurance (anti-gang initiatives).

The Council has also responded positively to initiatives from residents. Both the Child-friendly borough initiative and the Hackney Play Streets project were initiated by local residents with support from the voluntary sector and are now funded and supported by the Council.

'Hackney puts a high value on understanding local needs and quality in commissioning'

The Council consults with voluntary sector providers on the needs of the children and young people they work with, prior to commissioning, helping to inform what is commissioned. The Council puts a high value on understanding of local children and communities, and backs this up by including questions in the commissioning process that explore the provider's ability to meet local needs and challenges. This

has helped the local VCS to win contracts despite stiff competition from high profile, national charities.

Quality is also given a high priority in commissioning young people's services, ensuring that tenders go to those who can deliver a quality service, not those who offered the cheapest price.

'Devolved governments operate play partnerships nationally to provide valuable training, professional development and standards'

Since 2010, the UK government has cut funding for play services in England from £235 million between 2008 and 2011 to zero. In contrast, the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have continued to fund national play strategies and national play organisations.

As a result, the national play organisations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales work in partnership with their governments and work with, rather than compete with, local play organisations.

This has enabled Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to work with their local councils, to provide training, professional development and standards for play provision, and to provide high quality information and advice for all those who want to support better play opportunities for children – parents, playground designers, schools and afterschool clubs, nurseries, planners and local voluntary organisations.

The previous National Play Strategy in England led to an eight per cent increase in children's satisfaction with local play facilities. As childhood obesity and mental health problems continue to rise, there is a critical role for national government and play organisations to support play and child-friendly initiatives, such as those in Hackney, for children throughout England.

Nicola Butler is Director of [Hackney Play Association](#), a local charity that aims to improve children and young people's health, well-being and quality of life, through play. She is also Chair of Trustees of the national children's play charity, Play England.

BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL HAVE A ROLE, BUT LOCAL IS UNDervalUED

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

During 2018, we discussed the Better Way proposition, local is better than national, in the London cells and came to these conclusions.

Place still matters: In the age of digital platforms and widely available travel most of us are connected to many communities, but it seems that place remains important. Place and personal contact cannot be replaced by the internet; and it is where the deepest and most lasting bonds are forged.

Local and national: Our proposition states 'local is better than national'. Community life is where human relationships can best flourish, and imposition from the centre rarely works when dealing with complex social problems, as it inevitably produces standardised

and transactional behaviours, and reduces the potential for people to discover their own solutions. But that doesn't mean that we can or should ignore the national dimension. For the local to function well, we need local action to be supplemented by a national system capable of sharing and promoting ideas, encouraging challenge, developing common standards, and providing validation – with all of this guided and informed by evidence from local practice.

'Local institutions can be guilty of hoarding power'

Local institutions and communities are not always 'good': Localism is not necessarily benign. Local institutions can be guilty of hoarding power just as much as national and international agencies. And

communities, at their worst, can be divided and dispiriting places, resistant to change, dominated by elite groups, hostile and oppressive for outsiders and minorities. At the local level, the quality of leadership, especially in the public sector, is generally weak, failing to attract real talent or younger generations.

One response to such problems has been managerial – attempts to professionalise local administration, with armies of paid managers (relatively wealthy) doing things for communities (relatively poor). We have seen a movement away from neighbourhood and community levels towards larger geographical regions, in attempts to create economies of scale, centralising political and executive power most recently with directly elected mayors. But this shift from localism to devolution leaves place behind, replicates the national command and control culture, and reintroduces many of the behaviours which leave people feeling they have somehow lost control.

'Untapped strengths that exist in even the poorest place'

Social infrastructure is important:

There are many places across the country where deprivation is high

and the local infrastructure is failing to cope, let alone improve things. In a time of austerity this is getting even worse. But while we need a strong and effective local infrastructure, especially where problems are most acute, we should not underestimate the untapped strengths that exist in even the poorest places. The answer is not to send people in to 'intervene', but rather to take steps to realise local capability and invest in the people who live in these places and create the conditions for them to design and manage their own social infrastructure.

Organisations may sometimes be the problem: As mentioned earlier, organisations can often 'hoard power' and create command and control barriers between themselves and those they serve. Power can corrupt but it can be important to understand the emotional drivers too. There may be anxiety about getting too close to those with whom one works, or fear of being attacked when something goes wrong. They may also suffer from a lack of aspiration and lack of belief that they can make fundamental change happen. Too narrow a focus on targets may lead to a loss of fundamental purpose.

Making a Better Way place

We have heard about places where people, including in some cases those involved in the Better Way network, are attempting to operate according to the Better Way propositions. Examples can be seen in Coventry, Taunton, Stroud, Frome, Doncaster and elsewhere.

What would a Better Way place look like?

‘Networked organisations are likely to work best’

Networked organisations: local institutions, including voluntary agencies, would be doing far more to build contact and credibility with local people over time, doing things ‘with’ rather than ‘for’, with a willingness to operate across traditional sector boundaries, identifying common cause, while recognising that all communities are highly complex, with multiple competing interests. Networked rather than command and control organisations are likely to work best.

Making community connections: Sustained community connector or community organiser activity, as well as activities to build community ownership, and spaces for people

to come together to understand each other and make decisions together (such as participatory budgeting), alongside mechanisms to encourage transparency and challenge, all seem essential for real progress to be made.

Stronger democratic institutions and community based organisations would help give voice to local needs and concerns and provide a challenge function.

Finding the right level: We would have a better understanding of ‘subsidiarity’ – of where activity best takes place and how local activity is supported by national and regional actions.

Ambition: Local organisations would have high aspirations to solve problems, not just service them, and to create stronger communities, and would have the tools to deliver this eg through better feedback mechanisms, ways of spreading experiences and greater front-line autonomy which encourages a ‘journey of discovery’.

‘Community organisations and activists often have lived experience and connections that make them more effective than national organisations’

Valuing 'context' skills: There would be a better understanding of where local adds value and of what has been called 'context' as well as 'content' skills and knowledge. Community organisations and activists often have lived experience and connections that make them more effective than national organisations. The concept of 'professionalism' would be reconfigured to include 'kindness' and relationship building.

Getting more money into communities. Ways would be found to get more resources for local activity, for example local giving organisations, crowd sourcing and commissioning that recognises the value of local.

What needs to change?

'Stop talking about scaling up, talk about spreading ideas'

Valuing the local more. Big is not necessarily better than small, and often the reverse is true, as large organisations are more likely to become disconnected from their communities and more inclined to self-protection. So we should stop talking about scaling up whenever we see an example of good local practice and talk about 'spreading'

instead. And large organisations would do well to consider whether they can let go, providing much higher levels of autonomy to their constituent parts.

Making a better case for local.

We need to make a better case for localism and the power of place to drive positive change. Some national problems cannot be overcome without a much greater emphasis on local action (homelessness for example) and agencies working in fields where this applies need to be brave enough to say so, and change their operating model, even if that threatens the current way of doing things.

Use national and international

power too. Some problems cannot be tackled only at neighbourhood level but there is still an important role for the national, which needs to be better understood and articulated. The challenges of migration and climate change for example need concerted action at international levels. Perhaps the best future will come from greater emphasis on the local and the international, and less on the national.

PRINCIPLES ARE BETTER THAN TARGETS

All too often universal targets, standard setting and inspection regimes fail to encourage the best behaviours or prevent the worst. Quality is a continual process, emerging from principles of human dignity, best reinforced by reflective practice, citizen engagement, challenge and accountability.

LEARNING TO RIDE A HORSE



A PERSONAL STORY BY LIZ RICHARDSON

My friend loves horse-riding. Her greatest wish for her 50th birthday was to go riding with her friends. I hated horse-riding. And the truth was I had never even sat on a horse – not even a donkey on Redcar beach.

My friend did what any good friend would do, and ignored my many objections. Instead, she focused on my ‘weak’ spots where I might be persuaded. Things she knew I was proud of: being a loyal friend; learning new things.

And so, the lessons started. And I hated them. Nearly as much as I still hated horse-riding. Horses were even scarier up close; terrifying when a rider was sitting on top, careering round a small rectangular pen at 15 mph. Much of the equestrian world seemed dominated by impenetrable jargon which a new entrant had to learn to not be a fool. For example, knowing that a ‘forward-going ride’ or ‘lively ride’ actually meant unstoppable charger. And a ‘quiet ride’ or ‘bomb-proof’ could mean a

depressing time with an apathetic mount refusing to trot.

Worse of all, lessons were awful. Time-consuming and expensive, demoralising and confusing. It doesn’t matter how many times someone shouts the same bizarre phrases at me, I still won’t understand them any better.

‘change the rein’
‘leg on!’
‘check your diagonals’

The instructor packed me off to the 50th birthday ride with some not very reassuring parting words, including things like ‘you’re nowhere near ready, I wouldn’t do it if I was you, or wear a body protector.’

We did the birthday ride. My friend had a marvellous time. I managed not to fall off.

And I still hated horse-riding. Life went on, and I was thankful I never had to endure the experience again.

I went back to work as a University teacher. The organisation got a silver grading in its assessment (TEF) – close, but no cigar. One of the main areas dragging down the score was assessment and feedback i.e. how we graded and gave comments on students’ work. In my department, we already knew this was where we hadn’t quite got things right. But we weren’t sure how to tackle it. The Faculty had produced a standardised set of words we could use to describe work, but these left students still unclear what they had done poorly and what to do differently. What the heck does ‘be more analytical’ mean? What is ‘overly descriptive’ when it’s at home? Some essay comments were about justifying a low mark (ie what the student did badly) rather than suggesting improvements. Students’ experiences of getting feedback were also demoralising. All that effort, and they were not good enough. What an unpleasant learning experience they were paying so much for.

Then it dawned on me. It was the same as my horning experiences. We were telling them they had fallen off the horse; that they weren’t good enough.. And to change this outcome, all the students could hear was us shouting ‘change the rein’ without explaining what or how.

We got a group of students together to help us think things through. They offered to work with us, and we put on a joint workshop on understanding feedback. We started conversations with colleagues about why we were doing this, about the fact we wanted to help learning not just appease TEF assessors. We discussed lecturers’ concerns that this was about meeting targets, or grade inflation. We emphasised formative feedback rather than focusing on better synonyms for failure. We have lots more work to do, but we are getting better slowly.

What are the morals of this story? Principles are better than prescription. Using opaque language gets in the way of learning. It’s better when you see from things from the users’ perspective. Advice needs to be meaningful to the recipient. And the end for me? Three years after my first hateful riding lesson, I bought Spot the Pony and we are now learning together.

Liz Richardson is a Reader in Politics at the University of Manchester. Her research interests include: decentralised urban governance; public policy; citizen participation; and participatory research methods. Her recent work includes a co-authored book ‘Designing public policy for coproduction’, published by Policy Press in 2016.

'IT CHANGED MY LIFE'



A PERSONAL STORY BY MARK GAMSU

Recently I was participating in the annual meeting of Darnall Wellbeing. This is a community health project which has worked in Darnall and Tinsley in Sheffield for many years. Darnall is one of the most deprived parts of the city, which is one of the reasons that it has a rich and diverse range of communities and cultures.

Darnall Wellbeing is a local community project – it does have a small team of workers but much of its service is provided by volunteers from the community.

While I was at the meeting I was chatting to one of the local councillors – a young Asian woman who is from Darnall. She told me this story.

'I was not allowed to drive a car. . . 15 years later I am a councillor representing my community'

'When I was still living at home as a young woman it was hard for

me to go out on my own – I had to be accompanied if I wanted to go to the local shopping centre and I was not allowed to drive a car. I was lucky enough to go on an eight week Introduction to Community Development and Health Course run by the public health team in Sheffield with other local women in Darnall and Tinsley and now..... fifteen years later I am a councillor representing my community on the City Council. It changed my life.'

This story made me think of a number of things.

First, it reminded me about the course. At roughly that time I managed the team who delivered this programme across Sheffield. This course was different to traditional health promotion courses in that it did not just focus on 'health literacy' or health education. Its premise was that people in disadvantaged communities were already interested in their health and the health of their families and communities. The course

put an emphasis on locating the causes of good health and well-being in a wider social context and then supporting attendees to take practical action in their communities. For many people the outcome was to get more actively involved in their community or to start on a path back to education.

The ambition of the course was to create local activists who would promote health and wellbeing.

Second, as I spoke to the councillor and heard her fifteen year long story it struck me how inadequate targets and performance measures are to capture the impact of this small and low cost intervention. In order to justify funding for this course (and this is quite common for community interventions of this type) we were expected to be able to demonstrate that people on this programme had either improved their own personal health and wellbeing or improved the health and wellbeing of their family.

As the councillor who is the subject of this story showed me, the impact of the course was – for her and her community – substantial but the idea of measuring this impact over the short timescale of a financial year or two was clearly not appropriate.

‘We have to develop metrics that reflect the profound nature of the challenge’

I am not against measurement at all – it can make an important contribution to accountability and improvement – but if we are to tackle serious societal challenges to structural inequality we have to develop metrics that reflect the profound nature of the challenge and bring a seriousness to measurement that moves us away from the superficiality of present approaches.

I think that this story supports two Better Way propositions – first, building on strengths is better than focussing on weaknesses and second principles are better than targets.

Mark Gamsu has worked in the voluntary and community sector, local government, the NHS and civil service. He is interested in the relationship between the public and the local state. He is a Professor at Leeds Beckett University and is actively involved in a number of voluntary organisations in Sheffield.

HOW TO HIT THE POINT, NOT THE TARGET



IDEAS FROM BETHIA MCNEIL

The social sector has a curious relationship with accountability. I was warned early on in my career in research and evaluation never to use the 'A word' lest it alienate practitioners. This may just be the case in the youth sector, with which I am most familiar, but I doubt it. There is a sense that accountability is a stifling and constraining force, aligned with mistrust, surveillance and time-wasting bureaucracy. Meaningless data capture, handed over but never used. Never suggest that practitioners might do something in order to be (more) accountable, I was told – you're sure to immediately kill off whatever behaviour you're trying to encourage. If our primary allegiance is to the communities and individuals we 'serve', then having another master, such as a funder or commissioner, to whom we are accountable feels uncomfortable – and this is heightened when the terms of our accountability are often so different to how we judge our relationships with 'beneficiaries'.

That said, the social sector is quick to invoke its track record of accountability and transparency when under pressure: our governance and funding structures mean we have nowhere to hide, we argue, and we know that trust in us is contingent on openness and responsibility.

It's clear that the problem doesn't lie with accountability per se. A desire to be entirely unaccountable to anyone doesn't tend to fit terribly well into the charitable sector. The vast majority of practitioners I've worked with and alongside during my career have shared a fierce sense of accountability to the young people they support. So what is it about certain forms of accountability that are considered so anathema to our work?

I think there are two features of the dominant framing of accountability in the social sector that are driving the toxicity that surrounds it. The first is its

high stakes nature, and the second is its focus on targets.

'High stakes accountability distorts practice, undermines relationships and limits learning'

High stakes accountability creates a fear of failure, or falling publicly short against prescribed and externally set standards. It tends not to offer support to improve, but rather to use one-off assessments of performance, often perceived to be unattainable. There are few chances to try again to make the grade, and failure feels like it has consequences. This kind of high stakes accountability distorts practice, undermines relationships and limits learning. Trust and respect is eroded. There is a sense of time wasted, complying with meaningless and burdensome processes and requirements, of 'jumping through hoops'. Many practitioners do their very best to avoid it altogether: providing poor quality or incomplete data, subverting systems and processes to reduce their impact on practice.

'Hitting the target – missing the point'

Targets are a close relation of high-stakes accountability. Targets can be implicit or explicit; their effect is usually the same. Targets have

been widely blamed for practices like 'parking and creaming', 'cherry picking' and gaming – dehumanising and corrupting the relationships that should be at the heart of all that we do. We've all heard the phrase 'hitting the target; missing the point'. We roll our eyes, and nod – we've all been there. The unspoken agreement is that the targets are never the point, and arguably once something becomes a target, the point is lost.

So, what is the point? No one is arguing against accountability, but what if it were lower stakes? What if accountability were always experienced in the context of receiving support to improve, and where 'goals' felt attainable, reasonable and fairly judged? What if working towards these goals felt like a good use of everyone's time? This could be revolutionary.

But perhaps even more importantly, any goals need to be aligned with 'the point' – the 'why' of why we do what we do, and the 'markers' that help us understand what high quality looks like. These are not targets, but signals that help us reflect and improve, and perhaps most importantly, are completely aligned with the change we hope to effect in the world.

Moving towards a lower stakes experience of accountability would call for a large-scale shift in the way the social sector and its funders think and behave. Difficult, but entirely necessary. However, alongside this, we need to collectively commit ourselves to better understanding of what high quality looks and feels like in our work, and focusing our accountability and improvement effort here. This is arguably even more challenging – it would represent an opening up of our practice to the best sort of scrutiny: deep reflection

and peer assessment, and the voices of those we seek to serve. Let's allow targets to take a back seat, while we focus unwaveringly on the point.

Bethia McNeil has been Director of the [Centre for Youth Impact](#) since its launch in September 2014. She has worked at the Dartington Social Research Unit, the Young Foundation and the National Youth Agency and NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute) and as a teacher and trainer. Bethia is a Clore Fellow and a Senior Visiting Fellow at Nottingham Trent University.

HOW TO MOVE FROM TARGETS TO PRINCIPLES IN SCHOOLS



IDEAS FROM GRAEME DUNCAN

Education in England is becoming a game of high-stakes accountability, where school performance is being boiled down to single performance measures based on the progress of pupils. And the impact of this is becoming clear; schools are reacting quickly to the high stakes incentives that this system creates.

'A forty per cent rise in permanent exclusions over the last three years is one result of high-stakes targets'

The curriculum is being tightened to focus on core subjects that will get the schools credit, to the cost of arts, humanities and languages in particular. Children who are unlikely to perform are finding themselves too often excluded from the mainstream system with a forty per cent rise in permanent exclusions over the last three years.¹ Teachers are increasingly

leaving state funded schools before they reach retirement and the secondary school system can neither retain nor recruit enough teachers.² School environments are suffering across the country as a result.

This is all being done in the name of social mobility. But school choice used to mean parents could pursue different curricular opportunities for their children. That choice has been eroded and means the only differentiator is becoming performance, which will further drive the inequity in the system as history shows that high performing schools, even when in poorer areas, attract more and more affluent cohorts.

Whilst accountability is essential, this target-based approach runs counter to the principles for which many

¹ Making the Difference, Gill, Quilter-Pinner, Swift (2017) – <https://www.the-difference.com/our-research/>

² Retaining and developing the teaching workforce, National Audit Office (2017) – <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/supporting-and-improving-the-teaching-workforce/>

joined, or would join the teaching profession, and is fraught with perverse incentives. Combined with year-on-year real-term cuts in school funding, it is leading to a greatly reduced quality of experience for all involved.

The education sector has become obsessed by the 'what'. What works, what targets have been achieved, what is the performance of the school etc. It has completely lost the sense of 'why' and 'how', which is where principles lie.

'Principles are seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded'

As a collective impact charity focused in education, we too often see places where principles are seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded. Leaders under intense pressure are regularly betraying the principles that brought them into the job in the first place. They are paying a heavy price, but some children, particularly those being so regularly excluded from the mainstream system, are paying a far heavier price.

Moving from a target-based system to a more principles-led system would require a giant leap of trust in the teaching profession that is not frequently modelled by Ministers. There are four principles, generally

used in collective impact approaches around the world, that I would suggest adopting.

'Here are four principles that could replace targets'

1. **Locally led:** the idea of a one-size-fits-all version of education is a scary one. Local context can see huge variations in the employment prospects, wealth, and the experience of education in children's homes. Whilst there is no doubt a core of subjects such as English and Maths should be assessed strongly as they unlock all other subjects, local leaders, families and children need a greater say in the curriculum that the school offers and the culture by which it operates.
2. **Research informed,** particularly in areas of disadvantage, where children will typically have less experience of education within their family to draw upon, and less ability to afford educational opportunity outside of school. Their schools just have to be more efficient in developing their capabilities and knowledge if they are to close the gap. The research base, although still nascent, and the principles by which effective practice should be implemented (identify need, design solutions

based on evidence, deliver in a carefully monitored way, reflect on the outcomes and learning gained and repeat the process) need to be widely adopted to close the gap.

3. **A collective approach:** education has become very fragmented. I was involved in the launch with the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, of the chains of schools, which later become the academy chains. Their vision was simple – before too long 15-17 organisations would be running all the schools in the country as it was ridiculously fragmented that 140 local authorities ran schools as it stood. We've now passed 5,000 different organisations. The carve up of the sector has been very competitive, and any sense of the collective has waned. There are several local attempts to bring people back together but this needs to be expanded and better bring together 'context knowledge experts' (local leaders, teachers, families and children) with 'content knowledge experts' (those specialist in helping schools adopt effective interventions targeted at specific needs).

4. **Capacity building:** the sector remains very low on capacity and attempts to create a market for school led improvement in delivery is failing. Current and future leaders need to be developed to lead the transformation of the system through the development of principles such as those laid out here.

A targets based approach has led us to a place where we haven't enough teachers to fill classrooms, and when a school can be seen to deliver success against its single accountability measure by excluding non-performing pupils at a great cost to those pupils and society. Something has gone seriously, seriously wrong.

The need to move towards a balance between accountability and principles is clear.

Graeme Duncan started his career as part of the first Teach First cohort in 2003, and has since worked in the beyond profit sector focusing on the issue of educational inequity. In 2015 he set up [Right to Succeed](#), a collective impact charity focused on changing educational outcomes in areas of disadvantage.

LOCAL CORNERSTONE: PURPOSE VERSUS TARGETS — A BETTER WAY



A CASE STUDY BY EDEL HARRIS

Over recent years, with the emphasis on austerity and the resulting public service funding crisis, the social care sector in the UK has become an industry that in many cases has lost the focus on the person requiring care and support. Time and tasks have become the order of the day with often stressed, low paid workers following a schedule and a set of rules that have more in common with a manufacturing production line.

Power needs to be felt within local communities where one of the most intimate of transactions is delivered by people who are trusted to do a great job. To this end Cornerstone has introduced a new model which we call 'Local Cornerstone'. The model is based on several principles, the most important being related to our purpose:

'To enable the people we support to live a valued life – a life they choose.'

If you work on the premise that people who want to work in the social care sector are motivated by making a positive difference. If you recruit for values and attitude and you then provide an environment where colleagues are genuinely trusted and empowered to do a great job, you will find that amazing things happen.

'Can you imagine a workplace with no managers?'

Can you imagine a workplace with no managers, no supervising and checking, no burdensome policies and procedures, three simple measurements and a network of up-skilled, local, self managed teams all focused on achieving a charitable purpose?

Cornerstone is changing its culture to remove hierarchy, replace traditional management with a coaching

approach and by stripping out unnecessary policies and procedures we are trusting people to do the right thing. We only recruit and retain the very best people by hiring for values. We are improving staff retention and happiness by demonstrating our appreciation of the wonderful work our colleagues do and by allowing team members to manage their own workload. By reducing our central overheads and as a result of a significant investment in technology we have managed to do all of this in a financially sustainable way.

Most importantly we can see the difference this new way of working has made to the lives of the people we support.

'Free to use her imagination and skills'

Clare moved into a self-organising team in Glasgow. Clare was supported to appreciate her value and given the confidence to recognise that hers is a valued profession. She was paid more. She has blossomed in her role and every day undertakes activities with the people she supports that are not restricted by a list of tasks and over-burdensome processes and policies. She is free to use her imagination and skills to meet our charitable purpose. She recently attended a care review. In her old

role she would never have been allowed or expected to attend such a meeting. With her new found confidence as a 'professional' she contributed as an equal and her input was appreciated. Clare left the meeting feeling ten feet tall and knowing that the outcome for the young man is exactly what it should be thanks to her contribution.

A Local Care and Support Team in Irvine support Mary who has had a very traumatic life. Her children were taken into care and only recently is she back in touch with her daughter who was planning to get married. Mary is too unwell to attempt the trip. The team decided that Mary should experience being a 'mother of the bride'. They took her to buy an outfit and to get a manicure; they organised a buffet and transmitted the ceremony onto a big screen. The whole team came to the 'wedding' dressed in their finery. This wasn't within contracted hours but because the team are trusted and empowered to deliver on the charitable purpose they were able to make this happen. The Prosecco served at the wedding, in the old days would have been a breach of our Alcohol Policy!

Brian lived with his sister Joan in Dundee and was her main carer. Joan had dementia. Cornerstone colleagues visited Joan three times

a day. Joan died suddenly and all the contracted hours of care were immediately stopped. The team realised that Brian was grieving and lonely. Because he was the main carer he had lost all community connections. The team decided to continue to call in to see Brian to help him to re-establish friendships in the area. After a while the daily visits became 'now and then'. The extra hours of time were paid for by the Cornerstone Foundation

'Throw away the rule book'

Throw away the rule book. Recruit and retain the best people with the best attitude. Value them and trust them to do a good job. Remove the

obstacles that are in their way and challenge regulation and contract compliance when you believe it is contrary to the outcome you are trying to achieve.

No one wants their legacy to be that they met their KPIs – we are driven by a sense of purpose and a desire to make a difference.

Edel Harris joined [Cornerstone](#) as CEO in 2008, having previously been Deputy Chief Executive of Aberdeen Foyer. A former Metropolitan Police Officer, her background is in health promotion. Edel is also a Director of the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust, Director of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) and of the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO IMPROVE A PLACE? EARLY LESSONS FROM BIG LOCAL



A CASE STUDY BY MATT LEACH

In 2010, the Big Lottery Fund embarked on a unique, ambitious and radical experiment – to provide 150 local communities with £1 million each over fifteen years, with all decisions on how the money should be spent, and on what, devolved to local residents.

'Big Local represents the biggest current trial of a Better Way's assertion that principles are better than targets'

As a programme it represents perhaps the biggest current trial of a Better Way's assertion that principles are better than targets, an opportunity to explore the extent to which place-based, bottom-up solutions are capable of tackling problems decades of top-down funding have been incapable of resolving. At the half-way point of the programme – which will run until 2025-26 – it is starting to be possible to take stock of where

the programme has got to and – tentatively – to form a view on the extent to which some of these ambitions have been fulfilled.

What is immediately apparent when you encounter many Big Local areas is the extent to which a principle-driven approach to funding – devolving power, resources and control to a community level, providing unconditional support over the long term; and avoiding top-down targets or short term spending goals – has succeeded in generating mass community action and participation. At the last count around 1,500 local residents were involved in community level governance over the programme, and at least an order of magnitude more in delivery of Big Local funded activity.

What is also striking is the way that, under a single programme, very different approaches to delivering change have been able

to emerge, community by community, reflecting local priorities, assets and opportunities.

Lawrence Weston, a community on the outskirts of Bristol, has used Big Local funds to spearhead its own regeneration, using Big Local money to underwrite ambitious development plans across their estate, ensuring local residents benefit from new homes and energy projects coming into their area.

In the Arches Local in Chatham, local residents have established themselves as both community champions and custodians of a local environment that is finally improving as a result of residents' collective effort – transforming local greenspace, and tackling pollution arising from poor maintenance of the railway arches that provide the name for their area.

On the Welsh Farm Estate in Birmingham, we've seen local residents championing and initiating work to improve local greenspace, promote enterprise and transform their area through arts and culture, including an ambitious partnership with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

And in Newington in Kent, we've seen a community come together to rebrand their entire area, as

part of wider work tackling wider perceptions of the area and celebrating a positive sense of collective identity and place.

Given time, money, trust and support, each of those local communities – and many more – have been able to harness local energy and initiative, thrash out shared priorities, focus attention and effort, and start on a journey to transform their areas in sustainable ways that reflect their individual circumstances and needs. This is a very different way of tackling entrenched issues in communities; not the cookie-cutter strategic objectives of external funders; the relentless cult of attempting to artificially replicate 'what works' irrespective of context; or the perilously short timescales of too many publicly funded programmes. Rather a myriad of micro-solutions, responsive to context and driven by genuine bottom up, resident leadership.

That is not to say that Big Local has been problem free. Some areas have encountered conflict or have taken time to get started. Other communities have hit problems when projects didn't come off or proved more difficult than they initially hoped. But many have shown incredible imagination, resourcefulness, and resilience taking

on a programme which – through its freedom from targets or tick-boxing – forces responsibility onto individuals and communities to set priorities and make decisions. Indeed, given the time and support to build confidence, skills and capacity, most communities have shown they have the potential to take on responsibility for defining and commissioning their own solutions to the challenges they face.

And it is the realization of that potential that makes Big Local – arguably – much more important and interesting than just another funding stream, with lessons of relevance to national and local government and communities themselves.

When I visited Church Hill Big Local in Redditch recently with the Chief Executive of the local council, we were taken on a tour of the area. We saw a neighbourhood that – five years into their Big Local programme – had transformed itself through a rich mix of local voluntary action, small amounts of Big Local funding and a creative partnership with a local authority that had itself started to reorganise its services around a recognition of the importance of place. Pathways had been cleared, environmental improvements delivered, issues around litter and minor vandalism addressed. As a result, not only was the community a

much nicer place to live, but minor crime and antisocial behavior had dropped to the extent that police and Police Community Support Officers no longer needed to be based there.

It immediately raised the question – if committing relatively small amounts of money to communities and trusting them to get on with brokering and commissioning their own solutions to local problems can be quite so effective, why aren't we doing it everywhere? At a time when local authority budgets are pressed ever harder, and councillors and officers struggle to deliver even statutory services, might one way forward be to explore the potential that might come from allowing communities to take the lead in prioritizing what they feel needs tackling, and giving them the resources they need to commission their own solutions?

'Significant change in any place takes time and has to be founded on and around the people who live there.'

If we are to even tentatively go down that route, we will need public agencies brave enough to match the commitment of the Big Lottery Fund in 2010-12. To release the potential of communities, long-term commitment is key – the Big Local timeframe stretches over ten to fifteen years – and once the money is committed

to an area there is no conditionality and no going back. Critically, alongside that money comes a willingness to give communities the space and support to develop the skills and confidence they need; a huge tolerance of different approaches; an acceptance of the need to allow people to take risks; and a recognition that communities, if they are to grow in confidence, need to be allowed to make mistakes, review, learn and recover from them. Significant change in any place takes time and has to be founded on and around the people who live there – something that is too often absent from shorter-term, project-based initiatives.

It's early days to reach final judgements about the success of Big Local – there are another seven years and lots of learning, evaluation and experience still to come. But if a fund based on principles continues to demonstrate the outcomes we are starting to see on the ground, it may start to beg the question: why are we continuing to set targets?

Matt Leach is CEO of [Local Trust](#), which is investing £1 million each into 150 different neighbourhoods to promote resident-led transformation of some of our most deprived places. Matt's past roles include CEO of HACT, the social housing sector's ideas and innovation agency, and a senior civil servant at MHCLG and the Cabinet Office.

HOW TO DRIVE GENUINE IMPROVEMENTS IN PERFORMANCE

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In early 2018, the London cells discussed the question of whether principles are better than targets.

Problems with top down targets are clear. They lead to gaming and are disempowering. Although some people thought national targets had raised standards in, for example, poor performing schools, most were concerned about the side effects, including high levels of permanent exclusions. National benchmarks also failed to reflect different circumstances and are often too short-term to allow time for real change. So we talked about better ways to motivate improvement and achieve accountability.

'Measures that drive learning and improvement cannot be accountable targets'

Goodheart's law (a Bank of England economist) is that measures that drive learning and improvement cannot be targets for which you are

held accountable, but we often use targets for both roles.

If targets are not set top down but are used locally either to drive learning or promote accountability, they can be helpful. People understand and even demand targets – eg the people at Grenfell Tower wanted accountable targets for the use of donations. But these should be set with the full involvement of the people affected, and reflect the richness and diversity of their priorities.

Importantly they should always flow from purpose, mission and values (and where they are used by funders there should always be negotiation). A starting question should be: what does 'good' look like to you? Targets should also capture wider benefits eg the contribution to the community, and the degree of local engagement.

What we need is more 'reflective' and 'inductive practice', with data

about performance put into the hands of those on the front line who can use it to drive improvements themselves. Targets can then give something to aim for, and help break change down into manageable pieces. Performance measures can help people navigate their way to excellence – a kind of sat nav – by providing parameters to help them.

What needs to be encouraged is a more investigative mind set, coupled with higher aspirations– not just to turn the dial from minus one, but to move it to plus one. But the way to do this is to empower and equip self-learning.

‘We need a network of curious people, who really want to understand how change happens’

We need a national network of ‘curious people’ who really want to understand how change happens and what the levers are, including amongst commissioners. In the USA there are ‘cities of learning’, which look curiously at the resources in a place and how they can be better used.

Some funders are starting to be more interested in an organisation’s ability to learn, rather than in targets. But many organisations still ‘pretend’ they can deliver targets: more honesty is needed.

There should be greater trust, linked to a deeper understanding of what we are trying to achieve and what we can control. Top down targets are currently being used as a substitute for these.

‘The “how” not the “what”’

Outcomes stars – which reflect the many outcomes that people may wish to achieve eg to experience good mental health – may be useful tools but it is bit like giving a picture of a car to a production line worker and saying: ‘build that’.

The current model of social change – and the targets that are set – neglect the wider influences that affects lives though communities and systems. We need to better understand how change happens and invest in the wider things that affect everyone’s lives, not always focus on individuals.

The ‘how’ is often far more important than the ‘what’ – the operating principles matter and these need to reflect individual needs and rights. Rights based schools were achieving higher results than Academies, we were told, and it was suggested that parents, or consumers of services, should have the right to complain to an ombudsman if their legitimate expectations were not met.

An example of the power of the 'how' is the decision by the Housing Department of Great Yarmouth council to free itself from a standard process and treat all individuals individually, recognizing they had different needs. By adopting a system based on conversations with people about their housing problem, the council cut the waiting list from 6,000 in 2010 to 309 by 2015 – a reduction of ninety-five per cent. This was achieved without targets and was based on a systems-based Vanguard Consulting analysis – with the aim of reducing waste by getting it right first time.

Could funding be linked to evidence of the application of the Better Way propositions?

Accountability is very important but it should not be illusory. Trying to hold service delivers to account for the outcomes in people's lives is wrong because it is people who are responsible for those outcomes. We should focus on the things we can control, eg how our organisations are run, whether we respect human rights.

'National government should set aspirations and establish a regulatory and policy framework, not targets'

National government should not set top-down targets but it should set aspirations, provide the necessary national infrastructure and establish a regulatory and policy framework, as well as adequate resources. At the moment the setting of targets can obscure under-funding.

CHANGING OURSELVES IS BETTER THAN DEMANDING CHANGE FROM OTHERS

The best starting point is what we ourselves can do, putting the common good first and our vested interests last. The more we achieve, the more others will follow.

HOW DO WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN IN OUR OWN ORGANISATIONS?

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In 2017, we discussed in our London cells what it meant to be a Better Way organisation, or to lead one, and we quickly found ourselves radically challenging how things are done in the voluntary sector.

Many social sector organisations are part of the problem, we thought, bolstering a 'them and us' status quo, reinforcing deficit thinking, protecting their own privileges, and colluding with funders and policy makers to protect themselves as institutions rather than putting the interests of the people they work with first.

We also recognised that many organisations are trying hard to overcome this:

- Some do so by deliberately blurring the lines between staff, volunteers, service users, and creating a broad community united by a shared endeavour.

- Some are pushing against the boundaries of traditional organisational forms, creating flatter structures, focusing more on relationships, networks and collaborations, rather than 'professional' functions.
- Others are intentionally sharing knowledge and skills, adopting an 'open source' approach, and discovering that they can achieve more in that way.

'Organisations without walls'

Looking at this best practice, we concluded that we should be creating 'organisations without walls', whereby inherent competitive instincts and self-interest can be channelled towards collaborative and generous behaviours which are mutually advantageous. But changing organisational culture and behaviour is difficult. Resistance can come from

many quarters, and we need to be tactically astute, with a willingness to be tough and determined but also pragmatic, recognising that we are operating within an ever-changing and imperfect world.

We also thought we needed to practice 'radical listening' where our focus of attention is directed towards communities rather than government and funders. A willingness to attract and engage with diversity, building bridges within and across communities and identities, is not a nice-to-have, but a necessary condition for success, as to ignore this is to constrain and restrict the potential for social change.

The language we use to describe our organisations, our roles within them, and our purpose, can be instrumental in driving change, for good or for bad, our members thought.

'We need to tell a more honest story'

We need to tell a more honest story about what we can achieve. We should move away from making inherently spurious claims about our outcomes and impacts. Better to acknowledge that 'we sow seeds' which may or may not flourish, and that at best 'we walk with people' and with communities, help them take the direction they want, and take action to clear the paths of some of the obstacles they encounter.

To describe our work in these terms is not to diminish our efforts. Doing these things well is what drives and sustains social change. And excellence will not be achieved through imposed quality assurance frameworks, but rather through reflective practice based on an internal culture of honesty and clarity of purpose.

The essays in this section illustrate many of these and indeed other points.

'NO SPACE IN YOUR CERTAINTY FOR YOUR VOICE TO BE HEARD'



A PERSONAL STORY BY KATE WELCH

I'm a Southerner. I talk 'high faluting' according to a local councillor. I also know I'm not a naturally good listener, I'm full of good ideas – after all my Dad was a research and development electronics engineer so was always thinking of new inventions and I must have inherited some of that from him. He taught me to sing the Lambton Worm before we moved North. The words of the chorus go 'Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs', (=Be quiet, boys, shut your mouths) and are a great reminder of how to learn more from other people

Last year we were looking for premises for Gateway Wheelers, and came across the tithe barn in Houghton Rectory Park which was ideal for their new bike workshop. It was owned by Sunderland Council but in discussions the council told us that they would only consider a community asset transfer if we

took on the whole of the Grade 2* listed site of the Old Rectory and the tithe barn. After a short period of deliberation and a lot of work putting a business case and business plan together we negotiated a thirty year lease with an option to buy within five years. We've set up a new charitable company and applied for and already received grant funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund to explore the options for a full restoration programme into an enterprising building.

You might think that is great progress and a real achievement. A building was empty and is now in use and the council are delighted that an organisation with skills and experience has taken over the building.

Sounds like a perfect ending doesn't it? But perhaps not. While the

building was empty local people wanted to save it from going into private hands or worst of all being demolished.

The Friends of Rectory Park, a small community group of volunteers, made a bid to the council which went unanswered and were very anxious about what was going to happen to the building once we'd taken it over.

As you know I'm not from Houghton-le-Spring or even the North East. In order to be sure that we could become part of the community we started to listen as much as we could. We walked round Rectory Park with the Chair of the Friends and listened to all Sheila had to say. We invited the Mother's Union to afternoon tea with scones and cakes and even more listening. We've opened the doors to the community on several weekend events and we've already had over 5,000 visitors. We invited a number of local community leaders to an event to find out what was already happening, what the main issues were and to hear the ideas people had.

'I know I need to hear the voices of others so I stop myself rushing to solutions'

We've listened as much we can because although we have lots of experience we don't know what's best for people in Houghton-le-Spring. I heard a wonderful expression from Dr Louise Van Rhyn of Symphonia for Africa this week. 'No space in your certainty for my voice to be heard' and I've taken it to heart. I know I need to hear the voices of others so I stop myself rushing to the solutions that I think will work and just give others space to share their ideas and make their voices heard.

Changing ourselves is better than demanding change from others.

Kate Welch founded her first social enterprise, Acumen Development Trust, in County Durham in 2003. It has supported over 16,000 people to find jobs. Kate now runs [Social Enterprise Acumen CIC](#) which supports the start up growth and development of social enterprises in the UK and many other countries.

THE CATCH22 ENDGAME



A CASE STUDY BY CHRIS WRIGHT

Over the last 10 years Catch22 has established itself as a credible provider of a range of public services from Children's Social Care to Offender Management – a cradle to career proposition. The majority of this work is delivered through contracts procured via government (local and central) and government agencies. Much of it is heavily prescribed by the commissioner, overly specified, input-orientated with a focus on measuring outputs. This reflects adherence to an orthodoxy that's taken hold over the last 30 years, which is the antithesis to a relational, strength-based, approach. It's driven by a centralising, risk averse, statist philosophy, which 'designs out' trust, reciprocity and human agency. Self-reliance as the ultimate goal is undermined.

This is also the framework that governs the wider approach to public service delivery regardless of who delivers it. Success occurs more often in spite of the system than as a

facilitated consequence of it. Within this context we have tried to inculcate a culture across the organisation that recognises the pre-eminence of human relationships; that believes in doing what we say we are going to do; and values the wider capability which exists in the communities in which we work, and in those we work with.

'Treating people as recipients, processing their need, and measuring transactional outputs was not the way to change lives for good'

Last year we pivoted Catch22's business model to focus explicitly on the Endgame of 'government adoption', defined broadly. Through our public service delivery we would earn the authority and insight to improve the way things were done overall. This was informed by a paper co-authored by Alice Gugelev and Andrew Stern, published in 2015 by the Stanford Innovation Review: *'What's your Endgame'*. We

have long held a view that things need to be different, that our service delivery experience and exposure to those in receipt of our services consistently demonstrated that treating people as recipients, processing their need, and measuring transactional outputs, was not the way to change lives for good.

'Let's invest in testing and proving different approaches so in time the DNA of public policy is infected by practice and process that works – we can go viral!'

The Stanford paper provides a framework to re-imagine public services. It has informed a 'theory of change' which validates our delivery model. We are credible, we are efficient, we contribute to improving lives at the micro-local level, and we do this across the full range of possible life needs, cradle to career. This allows us to show policymakers that there are other ways of doing things: let's invest in testing and proving different approaches so in time the DNA of public policy is infected by practice and process that works – we can go viral!

An example of this is a project we delivered in partnership with Cheshire East Council, calling it Fact22. Project Crewe worked with children designated as children in

need under section 17 of the 1989 Children and Young People's Act. We made a modest change to the way this cohort of children were engaged in the care system: we worked directly with them and their families through practitioners and volunteers who didn't have to be social work qualified. The focus was on what was needed in their lives at that moment, and supporting them through community networks. The fact that this was considered radical shows how far the constraints of professional social work have moved us away from the vocation many of us trained in. It works. As of today this radical model has shown a thirty per cent reduction in social work caseloads, and more importantly deflected many children from acute intervention or entering the formal care system. The savings, in terms of resources and life-chances, are significant. By thinking differently, by recognising relationships matter most, and that there is capacity in the community that can be unlocked, we've not only helped to improve lives but demonstrated that a more human and less transactional approach delivers outcomes.

We have taken what we learnt in Crewe and expanded it into other areas of Cheshire, and more recently into Coventry. The Fact22 model exemplifies the three operating

principles that govern our approach to public service redesign. We have to be more human, we need to unlock the capacity that exists in our communities, while always ensuring we are locally accountable. My hope is that in a few years we can stop talking about Fact22 as a new model because it's just the way things are done.

The antidote to centralised, transactional, input focused service design and delivery is to transfer accountability to the most local level, believe in people's capacity to contribute, and to unlock the enormous amount of resources and capacity that exist across all our communities.

The Endgame for us all should be a re-imagining of the way public services support us, based on notions of trust, reciprocity, capacity and individual potential, and the importance of the relationship. To quote William Blake 'what is now proved was once only imagined.' Onwards.

Chris Wright is Chief Executive of [Catch22](#), the social business driving public service reform, and advocates for radical reform of a wide range of public services. Under his leadership, Catch22 has grown its work supporting others to transform their services, from advising government through to supporting and investing in big ideas and small delivery charities.

SOCIAL POWER: 'BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD'



IDEAS FROM SUE TIBBALLS

It slips easily off the tongue to say these are not easy times for civil society. There are real challenges: funding cuts, money flowing to the top of the sector, almost daily attacks on charities in the press, the Lobbying Act, 'gagging-clauses' and so on. All of this has led to us demanding a lot of change from others – the Government, usually – and mostly without much effect.

So, this is a good time to pause and re-consider.

First, is it all as bad as we think? And, if there are things that are wrong, who is best placed to make it better? My answers to these two questions are: 'no' and 'us'.

There is no doubt, there has been a vigorous shaking of the tree in the last few years. Some good organisations have gone down. But most would also say that some

over-ripe and even bad apples have fallen. And that's no bad thing.

Total revenue to the sector is at record levels. Public appetite for social change is at a peak. There is a lot to play for politically. And despite the best efforts of *The Daily Mail*, the public still trusts charities more than business or politicians. We have a unique 'licence to operate' – civil society's most valuable asset.

So, things are certainly changing around us, but there is still a great deal to work with and the best of civil society is responding to the challenge. And they are achieving some truly remarkable things.

This is the headline finding from The Social Change Project – an initiative SMK has been running for the last eighteen months. Its remit was to understand how social

change is happening today, in order to strengthen civil society's future efforts. The project brought together a community of practice drawn from right across civil society – from service re-design to social movements – to consider this question.

The story that has emerged is that civil society is driving some extraordinarily powerful social change and is, indeed, where most significant change originates. At best, civil society is resourceful, innovative, thoughtful and kind. It gets upstream of problems, unlocks value, shares power and saves money. It does things in ways that both the state and the private sector struggle to do.

'We believe civil society holds huge untapped potential – a capacity for change that we have called *Social Power*.'

The evidence suggests that civil society holds the key to some of society's most pressing challenges: from issues like climate change to knife crime and street homelessness. Working optimally, we believe civil society holds huge untapped potential – a capacity for change that we have called **Social Power**. Yet this latent power is constrained.

Some of these constraints are external – notably challenges to

voice and campaigning from the current administration and also, and maybe even more fundamental, a misunderstanding of *value*. To see civil society as being the same as the private sector, and to have internalised the language and behaviours of commercial markets, has distorted and fundamentally de-valued civil society's work. Our report argues that civil society, when delivering genuinely transformative change (as opposed to transacting services) does not work in the same way as the private sector and should not be commissioned on the same basis.

However, the Social Change Project report identifies even more internal constraints. It argues that realising the full potential of civil society – unlocking Social Power – is something that sits with us more than with those around us.

These constraints include:

- a lack of focus on mission – organisations that have become more driven by money and model, than by what they exist to do. When fundraising is king, both principle and purpose are lost.
- internal cultures that are too focused on performance management rather than impact

–tracking of outcomes can distract from focus on mission, slow organisations down and prevent them from being flexible, adaptive and responsive.

- a lack of inclusivity and diversity in the sector, and not enough connection with the grass roots. If civil society does not reflect those we purport to serve, then we cannot do the work. Legitimacy is compromised, our learning weakened and capacity to effect change reduced.
- a lack of bold leadership. Change happens when civil society thinks big, and dares to challenge. There was a strong feeling in our community of practice that civil society needs more leaders willing to do this.

‘Not to call on others. But to take the lead ourselves. And take others with us’

The final report of the project, *Social Power: how Civil Society Can ‘Play Big’ and Truly Effect Change*, does give recommendations for ‘others’ – for government and for funders. But it has more for those of us in civil

society. The report encourages us to use our knowledge, our experience, our resources – our power – to drive the change we want to see. Not to call on others. But to take the lead ourselves. And take others with us.

The report gives recommendations to strengthen organisational reputation, strategy and culture for those who run organisations and for all of us it has also identified ‘The Twelve Habits of Effective Change-Makers’.

In the words of Ghandi:

‘If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him... We need not wait to see what others do.’ That is our call to civil society today: ‘Be the change you wish to see in the world.’

Sue Tibballs is the Chief Executive of the [Sheila McKechnie Foundation](#) and has worked in the social change sector for twenty five years, chiefly in the areas of gender equality and environmental sustainability, both here in the UK and abroad, and in the private as well as voluntary sector.



How Civil Society can Truly Create Change

Drawn during an awayday to discuss SMK's Social Change Project, depicting how participants saw the opportunities and challenges
Illustration by Mel. Twitter @FeelGoodMel. Instagram @FeelGoodInsta

<https://feelgoodcom.org>

WHY WE NEED THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR'S COLLECTIVE EXPERTISE



IDEAS FROM MATT KEPPLER

You don't have to look far to see that our society is in decline. We have a government that imposes cuts. We have a population that donates charitably but is not giving anywhere near enough for us to meet the demand for our services. Worst of all, we see a growing demand for our services because the outlook for the most vulnerable people in our society is getting worse and it is happening on our watch.

'We have a wealth of expertise but are we harnessing it to its full potential?'

But we are a people to whom history hands moments like these as opportunities for significant turnarounds. Society owes much of what it takes for granted to the efforts of charities. Yet as individual people in individual organisations with individual priorities, we are stretched to the seams working to deliver positive outcomes with limited time and resources. Which means that

as a collective force for good, we are not well enough organised to catalyse social change on the scale we know our world requires. We have a wealth of expertise but are we harnessing it to its full potential?

My career has been in innovation, startups and charities. When assessing the likelihood of an initiative to succeed, you have to examine the initiative's ability to iterate; i.e. to receive feedback, learn from it and have the creative freedom to try again with an adapted idea. Take James Dyson, it took 5,100 iterations of the vacuum cleaner before it became the market leader in multiple countries. Iteration is about having the boldness to try something new, which can seem daunting in the charity sector given we rely on the goodwill of others to finance our operations and work in situations with little margin for error. We have to strike a balance between iteration and business as usual.

As with any collective undertaking, the key to achieving better outcomes often lies in smarter communication. As a sector, the world is our laboratory. Everything we do with every beneficiary we encounter is an experiment. We sincerely hope that our efforts will work but whatever we do will likely generate a mix of results; some positive, some negative, others neutral. How effective is the communication our sector uses to learn from this? We have conferences, training sessions, reports, social and traditional media, but how much of the stuff we hear really sticks? No-one monitors whether it does. We restrict the voices to whom we give a platform, to the tiny fraction of our collective workforce whom we consider to be the experts; the CEOs who speak on panels, the consultants who run training sessions, the heads of department whose opinions appear in articles.

In doing so we miss out on the expertise of over half a million people working in our sector who are experimenting everyday in their roles at the frontline of engagement with beneficiaries and stakeholders. How can we be surprised at the state of our society when our expertise as a sector is so fragmented? We have siloed our expertise in so many ways; by sector, organisation, department, seniority level and most sobering of all, at an individual level too. How many people working on the

frontline feel empowered to share their expertise with funders, policy makers, other organisations or even within their own organisation? And what faith would they have in that expertise being listened to and applied?

'Where is our Wikipedia for social change?'

Consider Wikipedia: the world's encyclopedia. Non-profit run, volunteer-powered and the fifth most visited website in the world. Wikipedia has democratised knowledge. Now anyone can find information on just about anything. Where is our Wikipedia for social change? Where is our aggregated expertise based on each of our interactions with beneficiaries and stakeholders. Where is our library of lessons learned, our repository of best practice, our online store of successes, our shared folder of failures? We live in a digital age where in our personal lives we experience the benefits of small seemingly irrelevant bits of data being brought together on a gigantic scale to make life easier on a daily basis. Products that match our interests are recommended to us by Amazon, our optimum route to work is scheduled by Google Maps, songs we've never heard before but are likely to love are easily discoverable on Spotify, new shows similar to ones we've enjoyed previously are suggested to us on Netflix.

Each of those recommendations are informed by data on what has and hasn't worked before, sourced from millions of interactions by millions of people with a similar goal. Are we not under a moral obligation to apply that same dedication to harnessing our collective expertise in order to inform the approaches we take with society's most vulnerable people?

The problem is that our expertise about beneficiaries and stakeholders is scattered across so many different places; our heads, our conversations with line managers, on pieces of paper, in multiple versions of the same spreadsheet, on databases we use grudgingly. What if it was all in one place? What if everyone in our sector could contribute their expertise, discover other people's, rate it, review it, apply it to their beneficiaries and stakeholders; and then share fresh expertise learned from the process? If we did that, imagine what kind of springboard for ideas, collaboration and most importantly, iteration, it would be. Imagine the effect it would have on public trust in charities and the support we receive through grants, donations and contracts. We have a golden opportunity to accelerate the pace with which we bring about social change. Yes there are challenges such as confidentiality but none that cannot be overcome with smarter privacy controls and anonymisation.

'Will we be the generation that failed to use technological advancements for the greater good?'

The question we need to ask ourselves as a sector is this: will we be the generation that lived through an era with the greatest technological advancements the world has ever known and failed to use those advancements for the greater good? We must not let that be our legacy. None of us want it to be. Which means we need to change. We need to find digital ways to share our successes, our failures and our lessons learned. That is the only way our collective expertise can be fully harnessed for the benefit of ourselves, our sector and society.

Every person I meet in this sector is so full of expertise which too often goes unshared. Together we have so much potential which is not yet fully realised. The path we have chosen, social change, is not easy, but if we commit to learning, sharing and adapting, a better way is possible.

Matt Kepple is the founder of [Makeable.com](https://www.makeable.com) which accelerates social progress. He created World Animal Protection's global Pawprint campaign and co-founded the Youth Funding Network and the Commission for Youth Social Enterprise. He gave a TEDx Talk at Cambridge University and has won awards from Channel4, Deloitte and The RSA.

INSIGHTS FROM A BLACK VETERAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LATENT ACTIVIST



IDEAS FROM KARIN WOODLEY

Sankofa – ‘it is not taboo to fetch what’s at risk of being left behind’

Remembering our roots are people not organisations is hard when our finances are diminishing, we are negatively scrutinised and we fear public scandals. In this adverse environment, we risk leaving our communities and people behind while we pursue business sustainability using public and private sector frameworks; sectors and frameworks whose failings we were first established to address.

As organisations born from community-based social activism, ‘polemics to policy’ is part of our DNA – we were skilled at taking radical ideas from the margins of society to the mainstream and we changed society for the better.

Fostering the innovation of our pioneering days means each of our organisations must return to a

structure unified by a strong vision grounded in an equally strong community voice. This is the only way we will meet the needs of the people we serve and find new developmental paths.

‘Keeping our organisations personal’

Social activism is intrinsically a change management process that relies on us keeping our organisations personal – we forget this at our peril.

Horrible histories

Decades of chasing growth has left us with structures that have lost their focus, are organisationally siloed, financially at risk and more reactive to changes in the operating environment than the changing needs of our communities.

We’ve allowed funders to have too great an influence on the direction

of our organisations' strategies and we're now browbeaten into complying with onerous regulatory reform – all in the hope it will help to turn the tide of apparently declining public trust.

Our organisations increasingly pursue self-preservation at all costs and our institutional structures are not fit for purpose – our legal and regulatory frameworks are arguably defunct. We've unwittingly, unstrategically, naively and sometimes disastrously participated in the privatisation of the state, aiding the transfer of risk from the state to individuals and communities while abetting the 'race to the bottom' in the provision of public services.

As a sector we're still not institutionally diverse and inclusive, our organisations are not classless and our narratives too frequently rely on deficit model perspectives that stigmatise the people we were established to serve.

So, what's a knackered chief executive to do?

Radical listening: To ensure our futures are defined by our communities' experience, knowledge and appetite for progressive transformation, we should treat our

communities less as 'consumers of services' and more as partners and participants. We need to reconnect with our communities by actively listening to them – a theory of change model is just a pretty picture if it's purely based on demographic desk-research and outcomes based on 'what we've always done'.

'We can stop "vampires" from draining our life blood – hand back the contract!'

Divestment: An unpopular word that conjures up the horrors of restructures and redundancies. Divestment is a positive tool that enables us to deploy resources strategically and helps us to be more self-determining. We can stop 'vampires' from draining our life blood: if you're being expected to do the impossible at bargain-basement prices and own all the risk, hand back the contract!

Grow-your own: We're used to nurturing and empowering our service users but often fall short when it comes to coaching and mentoring our own teams. There is no formula that ensures we recruit fully-blown social activists who can count, communicate well and consider our service users to be part of 'the family' – but driving radical inclusivity will reap long-term benefits.

'Inbreeding based on class, race, gender etc leads to several organisational disorders'

Inbreeding based on class, race, gender etc leads to several organisational disorders and mutations – it stops our internal structures from being inclusive, stops our communities from seeing themselves reflected in our teams and fuels a 'them and us' discourse that distances trustees and staff from service users.

Have skin in the game: Don't protect leadership and management at the expense of frontline services. For example, Merger – 'yuk'; reduce your Chief Executive's salary – 'wot?'; share profit and loss accountability – 'eh...' Financial literacy and understanding is important for the whole team because it helps us to make socially responsible financial decisions.

'We need to be leaders, not bosses'

Collegiality: Leadership dependency soothes Chief Executives' egos

but undermines our sustainability. We can't save the world or our organisation on our own – we need to be leaders, not bosses, and give our teams autonomy and the ability to be masters of their own (and the organisation's) fates. Collegiality is not an easy or gentle process; it pushes us to share power, demands cultural competence and, by emphasising a shared vision, creates the right environment for creativity and innovation.

At Cambridge House we've done all the above 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer' – as we become more honest with ourselves we are more confidently radical.

Karin Woodley is CEO of [Cambridge House](#), a Southwark-based social action charity. She is a board member of Locality, Community Southwark and the Economic and Social Research Council. Karin was previously CEO of ContinYou, the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, the Tabernacle Centre and the Minorities' Arts Advisory Service.

'NEVER DOUBT A SMALL GROUP OF COMMITTED INDIVIDUALS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD'



A CASE STUDY BY STEVE WYLER

When we started the Better Way network, we did so because we believed that there were a great many people who shared our wish to improve services and strengthen communities. They're already doing great things in their different ways and want to do more (as illustrated by this volume). But often it's a real struggle – we all find ourselves constantly working against the grain of institutional behaviour and it can be a hard and lonely road. Perhaps we could be stronger together?

So we brought together a small group of people who we believed would find each other stimulating, and who were all in their different ways social activists. We invited them to imagine the changes they would like to see, in how services are designed and delivered. And to imagine what good communities might look like. We certainly didn't agree on everything. We came from

across the political spectrum, and our debates were lively. But we found that we had a surprising amount in common and a set of core ideas soon emerged which are now the propositions included in this book.

'We wanted to stimulate enquiry, exchange, debate, and challenge and learn from others'

These are propositions, not prescriptions, or rules, or even principles, because we knew that telling people what to do would at best produce lip service and there is already plenty of that about. We wanted to connect to a deeper and more fundamental shift in mind-set and behaviour. We wanted to stimulate enquiry, exchange, debate, and challenge and learn from others. In other words, to involve people as actors and contributors in the Better Way project, not as passive recipients.

There is an old Chinese saying: 'Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll understand.' We hoped that if we could involve people in the Better Way thinking, not tell them, perhaps mutual understanding and change might flow from that involvement.

We remembered Margaret Mead's famous words: 'never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' We had already begun with a small group, and that way of working felt productive and invigorating. So we started to build up a wider network made up of small groups of people.

'There are surprisingly few opportunities for people pursuing social change to come together in a reflective and invigorating space'

We realised very quickly that conviviality helps. There are more than enough meetings as it is. But there are surprisingly few opportunities for people pursuing social change to step back from immediate pressures and come together in a reflective and invigorating space, outside of the usual office environment. Meeting at regular intervals over a meal, with everyone paying their own way, seemed to work well.

We called the Better Way groups 'cells'. They are like guerrilla cells, said someone, because our intention is radical and revolutionary. But they are also like biological cells, said another: the DNA of the Better Way propositions runs through every cell, even though they may take different forms, and over time the cells will replicate and grow a much bigger connected organism with a life of its own. Whichever metaphors we prefer it is exciting to see how people are organising themselves in different ways around the country, and how more and more cross-cell activities are taking place.

There are inevitably temptations to build a formal organisation, with its own institutional life. We want to resist that, and have tried to keep the whole operation as light touch as possible. We have two convenors, Caroline Slocock and myself, and the initiative is hosted by Civil Exchange, the organisation Caroline runs. We have attracted modest amounts of funding, from the Carnegie UK Trust and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, to contribute towards our time and expenses, as well as to provide a small fund to help with member activities, and the Carnegie UK Trust has provided administrative, research and communications support too.

Can a network be a catalyst for change and create a shift in favour of Better Way thinking and practice? Based on experience so far, we think it can give people inspiration and ideas and it also helps to know that there are others travelling the same road. We hope we are creating a growing momentum for change.

Robert Louis Stevenson said 'to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive' and the very act of travelling hopefully

together, but also purposefully, is more likely to bring about the kinds of change we want to see.

Steve Wyler is an independent consultant and writer in the social sector and is the co-convenor of a Better Way. From 2000 to 2014 Steve was Chief Executive of Locality (previously the Development Trusts Association), bringing together local organisations dedicated to community enterprise, community ownership, and social change.



A network of social activists committed to improving services and building community.

For more information, or if you'd like to take part, visit our website at www.betterway.network

 @betterwaynetwrk

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