
shifting our mindsets and assumptions

Common ground

Perspective

Lankelly Chase

Contents

4 Who we are

8 Introduction
what we mean by
perspective and
why it is important

14 Stories from our work

- 18** – Spaces Fund, Greater Manchester
- 24** – York MCN
- 28** – Meaningful Measurement, Oxford
- 32** – Gateshead Futures

36 What does it mean?
**Are we seeing the
change we want to see?**
An academic viewpoint

40 Thoughts to end with

Who we are

One of the most powerful things you can ever do is show that another way is possible'

Lankelly Chase is providing resources to support the wisdom and capability of local people as they collaborate to change the 'way things are done' in five places around England so that they are more equitable, inclusive and just.

When we say 'we' in this paper, we mean the loose community of changemakers involved in this work.

We're not focused on predetermined outcomes but on changing the conditions in the places - the written and unwritten rules, the prevailing mindsets and the assumptions about what happens and why.

We want to change how people and organisations relate to each other, who gets to make decisions, on what terms and with what evidence.

We use the ‘System Behaviours’, co-created by hundreds of people, as a guide to what better, healthier ways of doing things might look like (and to guide our actions in the day to day).

They’re not set in stone but this is what they say about Perspective and for now, this is what we are aiming at:

We are part of an interconnected whole

We are all connected in a web of life. Our individual actions are part of a hive of activity that is made up of the contributions of many people.

People share a vision

People gather around a shared vision and appreciate each other’s views. We all want the whole system to work, even if we know we can’t control it.

People are resourceful with many strengths

We make up an intelligent network of people who have both strengths and weaknesses, and continually learn and grow with each other.



We are united by a concern about the harms and pressures being heaped on those already subject to marginalisation. We share a broad vision of thriving places that work for everyone.’



This paper explains more about what Perspective means to us, what we think needs to change and some stories about how we are approaching that change work in practice.

Our academic learning partner, Northumbria University, provides a commentary on what they are seeing, whether positive change is emerging and the implications of different practices and approaches.

Readers should not expect a neat and unified view – we are different people taking different approaches and we have different starting points and perspectives. We see this as a strength. Nevertheless, there is coherence to this work. We are united by a concern about the harms and pressures being heaped on those already subject to marginalisation. We share a broad vision of thriving places that work for everyone.

We also do not have all the answers and our view is inevitably limited and partial. However, we do feel we have important learning to share. More than anything we want to encourage others, resource holders and local people, to try different ways of doing things.

Intro duction

**/ what shifting
perspective
means to us**

Paul Connery, Andy Crosbie, Kelly
Cunningham, Sara Fernandez, Avril
McIntyre, Catherine Scott, locally
based Lankelly Chase associates

We are the ‘associates’ supporting the work in the five places, where we also live. As with the activity going on, what we do varies. There is some commonality – we all play a ‘weaving’ role between different parts of the system (sometimes this is described elsewhere as ‘systems convening’ or ‘system stewardship’). We are all establishing and supporting coordination teams or other local infrastructure for decision making. Perhaps most importantly, we work to hold the space for assumptions about how things are done to be questioned, and for new ideas and ways of working to emerge – for perspectives to shift. (The idea of ‘holding the space’ is important - we think it is essential we don’t become the ones with the answers).

It’s an odd role at times: facilitating conversations; bringing people who think differently together and sometimes allowing them to stay separate so new things can emerge and grow; trying to keep the focus on ‘why and how’ over ‘what’; embracing conflict, even encouraging it; keeping the focus on learning.

It is often challenging. You are often edging forward, not quite knowing where you are going. We use the system behaviours for guidance. We trust that through bringing the right (not the same) people together to share thoughts, issues and ideas, new solutions emerge. It can feel both confusing and exciting at the same time.



Perhaps most importantly, we work to hold the space for assumptions about how things are done to be questioned, and for new ideas and ways of working to emerge – for perspectives to shift.’

It’s also weird working with a funder who genuinely thinks it’s ok if things don’t work out as planned, which often they don’t.

Lankelly Chase resourcing works differently to other kinds of funding for place-based work. It attempts to tackle the underlying dynamics that keep the system stuck. It enables people to come together to think, be creative and share perspectives so that new ideas form and take shape.

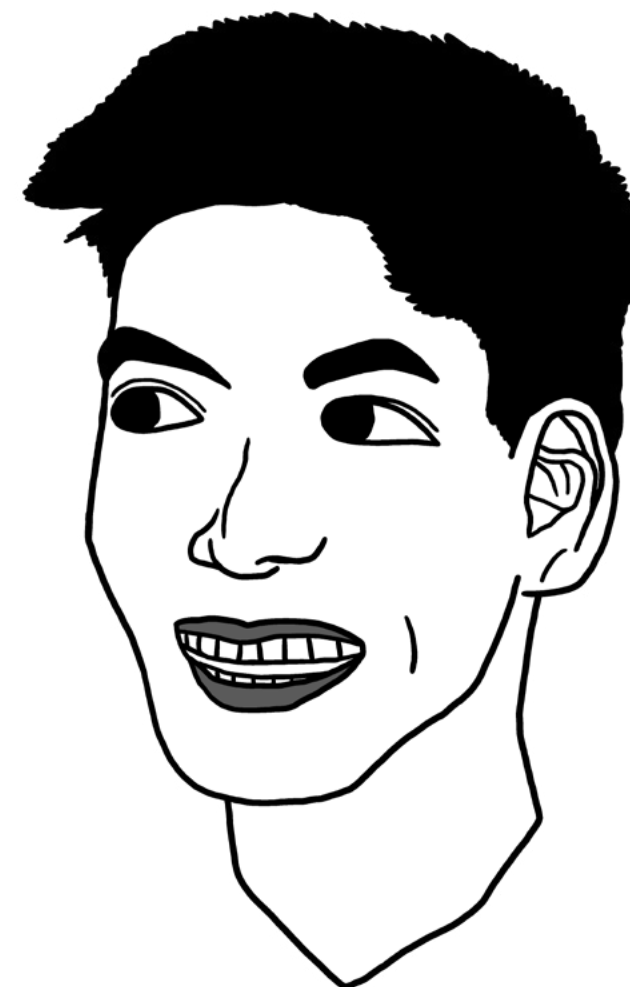
As associates, we get to be bang in the middle of these conversations, which is an exciting place to be. Often we don’t know whether we’re walking up a dead end or stepping into something completely new which takes on a life of its own.

Where we are now

We recently spent a couple of days together. We walked along Leeds canal talking through the joys and traumas in each of our places. The themes were almost identical, although we had all started out in different ways. Maybe we shouldn’t have been surprised.

Despite best intentions, people’s passion and a lot of hard work, current systems across our places don’t work for those subject to extreme marginalisation. We’re at a critical moment - Covid has made things worse and exacerbated inequalities but we don’t want to go back to how things were before either. We don’t want to repeat the same mistakes. We don’t want to continue to exclude those whose voices have not been listened to but who are so resourceful and creative.

It’s vital that we make space for different perspectives to be heard and explored – not just for the sake of it – but for actual change to emerge.



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There are others on a similar path if you look hard enough.'

Things we have learned about this practice...

Despite the differences in our work across the different places, there are experiences we share. We've found that building relationships with each other and with others doing similar work is incredibly useful. Progress can be slow. The work can be messy and hard to grapple with. It can also feel isolating. There are others on a similar path if you look hard enough. Having someone else to talk to who understands your frustrations and concerns can help you to feel less alone.

We have also found it is vital to widen our networks locally in order to bring in more perspectives. Actively seeking out new connections is important, as is continually asking 'who is missing?'.

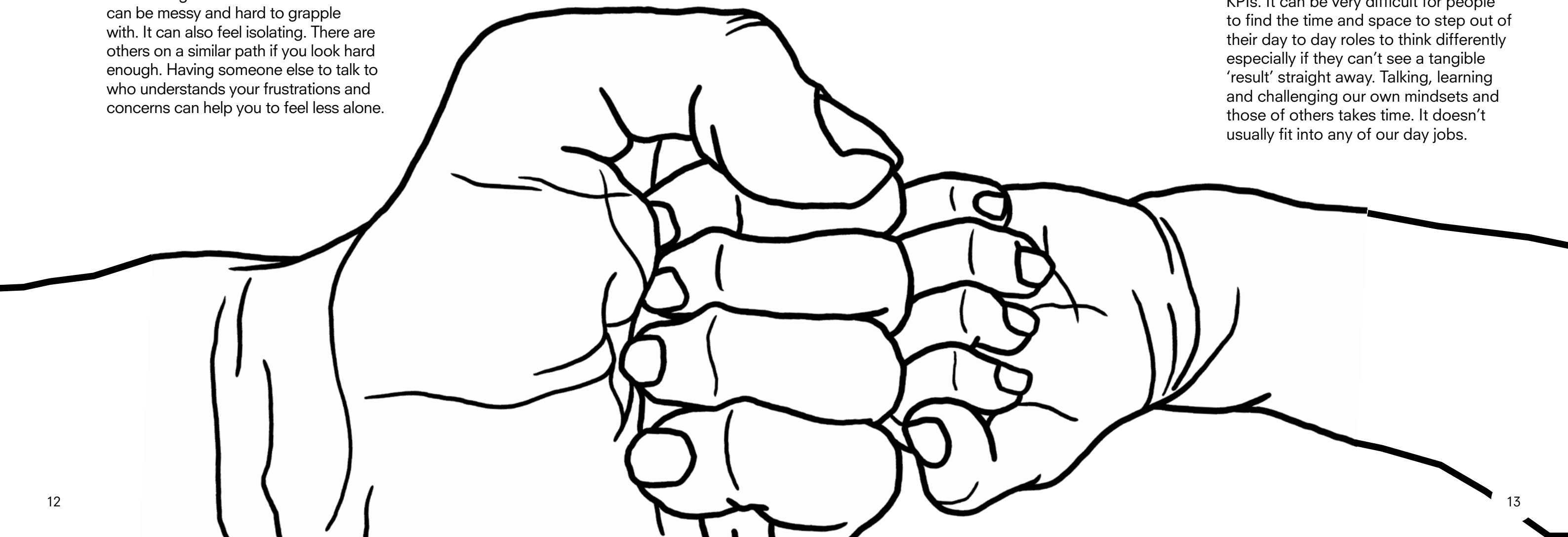
The work is often about sensing where the energy is locally. It is about supporting, connecting with and helping to build the capacity that already exists, so local people own and direct what's happening.



Talking, learning and challenging our own mindsets and those of others takes time. It doesn't usually fit into any of our day jobs.'

We have to work with dynamics we are also trapped in. We realised that we get in the way sometimes. It might be an attitude or a style – there is a need for reflection and reflexivity. For example, it's sometimes so much easier to step in and 'do' than to hold the space for others. We all want change but we're only human and we sometimes get trapped into thinking others need to change, not us.

Of course, a lack of capacity and resources can often get in the way. This is true of communities who have the skills and experience but lack monetary wealth. It is also true of statutory bodies and the voluntary sector who are stretched, and often working to unhelpful outcomes and KPIs. It can be very difficult for people to find the time and space to step out of their day to day roles to think differently especially if they can't see a tangible 'result' straight away. Talking, learning and challenging our own mindsets and those of others takes time. It doesn't usually fit into any of our day jobs.





It might not be possible to fully embody a different future, trapped as we are in systems as they are now, but there are small ways we can open the door to it.'

What gives us hope

It is clear that the appetite for change is growing as more of the systems begin to falter and crumble in the face of the impact of Covid and the complexities of the world. More people are open to testing new approaches and experimenting with doing things differently.

The approaches described in this paper highlight some of the ways it is possible to do work which embodies different assumptions and starting points – in essence different perspectives. It talks about learning together rather than measuring things which might not matter to people, putting resources at the service of systemic change, creating work spaces where we can relate as humans and what happens when we think about ourselves and our organisations as interconnected rather than as separate. It might not be possible to fully embody a different future, trapped as we are in systems as they are now, but there are small ways we can open the door to it.

In Greater Manchester the Spaces Fund began as a simple idea. We couldn't predict where it would lead. It came to life through the people who were involved and who formed the Spaces network. When we heard the stories about their amazing work and what transformational changes were happening, it was a great reminder about what a privilege it is to be involved in this work. Trusting the work, the principles (the system behaviours) and the people involved can lead to some amazing and humbling places. We were able to provide the opportunity to get the fund going and then we got out of the way and witnessed what grew out of it. This seems to sum up our jobs.

Stories from our work

If you are considering how to approach work to change the way things are done in your area or context, you might find these stories and insights from members of our community useful. Though we have put the spotlight on particular initiatives, they are each part of wider networks of interconnected local action.

Spaces Fund

Afshan D'Souza
Lodhi, GM Systems
Changers



Where:

Greater Manchester



What:

A devolved grant fund for people to explore how to heal, reimagine and transform systems so that all people can live with dignity and opportunity in supportive communities.

Who:

The GM Systems Changers core team and 39 small charities, CICs, networks and collectives primarily led by working class women and/or young people of colour



We see our work as liberating resources to people in communities, organisations and networks who are challenging injustice and creating the conditions for healthier systems to emerge.

The work

Lankelly Chase is following through on the system behaviour 'decision making is devolved'. It's doing this in Greater Manchester by devolving decision making over place-based strategy and budgeting to a core team of local people who are free to use our initiative to engage and take responsibility for our own change. Lankelly colleagues are members of the team but in the minority.

The core team has been recruited for our lived and learned experience of marginalisation and systems of oppression. We are also active participants in different networks and communities across Greater Manchester, in ways that Lankelly Chase, as a foundation, could only dream of!

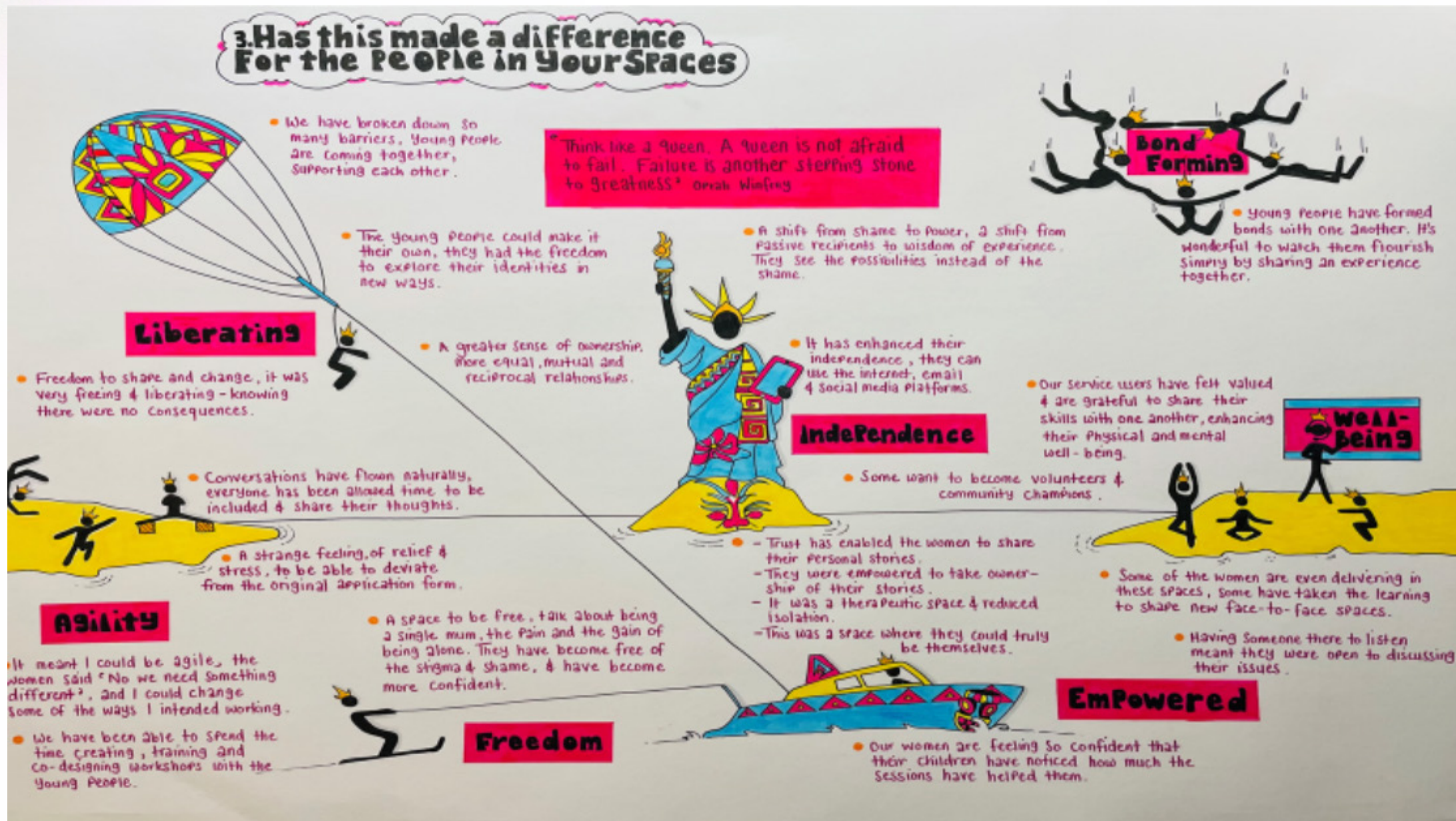
We're intending to devolve decision-making further away from Lankelly and ourselves and into the collective/community/network emerging in Greater Manchester.

We see our work as liberating resources to people in communities, organisations and networks who are challenging injustice and creating the conditions for healthier systems to emerge. We want to support a critical mass of changemakers who want to, know how to and will be free to contribute to a Greater Manchester which is healed by justice, equity and inclusion.

We established the spaces fund to reach people and networks that we currently don't have deep relationships with and to support this community to learn together. Through it we resourced 39 safe, independent and creative spaces. We used small grants (totalling £250,000). The majority of the spaces were led by and for working class women and/or young people of colour. The spaces included grassroots and community groups, some of which had never received funding for the work they did. They included small charities, CICs and unconstituted networks and collectives.

Our aim was to give people space to explore what it means to them to reveal, question and dismantle systems that perpetuate disadvantage and injustice and to heal, reimagine and transform those systems.

Throughout the year we held regular learning gatherings to create the conditions for open and trusting relationships to emerge. We had conversations about what was working, what would be 'even better if...' and we heard stories of change and stuckness from across Greater Manchester. We commissioned an artist, Selva Mustafa from the Elephants Trail, to do some graphic harvesting during the sessions.



Resource holders need to shift their mindsets...

There were insights that applied to Lankelly Chase and other resource holders:

Funders should think in terms of liberating resources:

As we've said above, people know how to create and maintain healthy systems rooted in equity, justice, compassion and love, they just don't have the resources...

Collaboration not competition:

Resourcing should support people to strengthen relationships with each other and it should nurture not cut across the spirit of Ubuntu - "I am becoz we are" and solidarity

Realism about what's needed:

The spaces fund was tiny in the face of massive structural issues

Trust people closest to the issues to know what's needed:

"No-one understands you like you"

Is it time for foundations to think about how to dismantle ourselves?

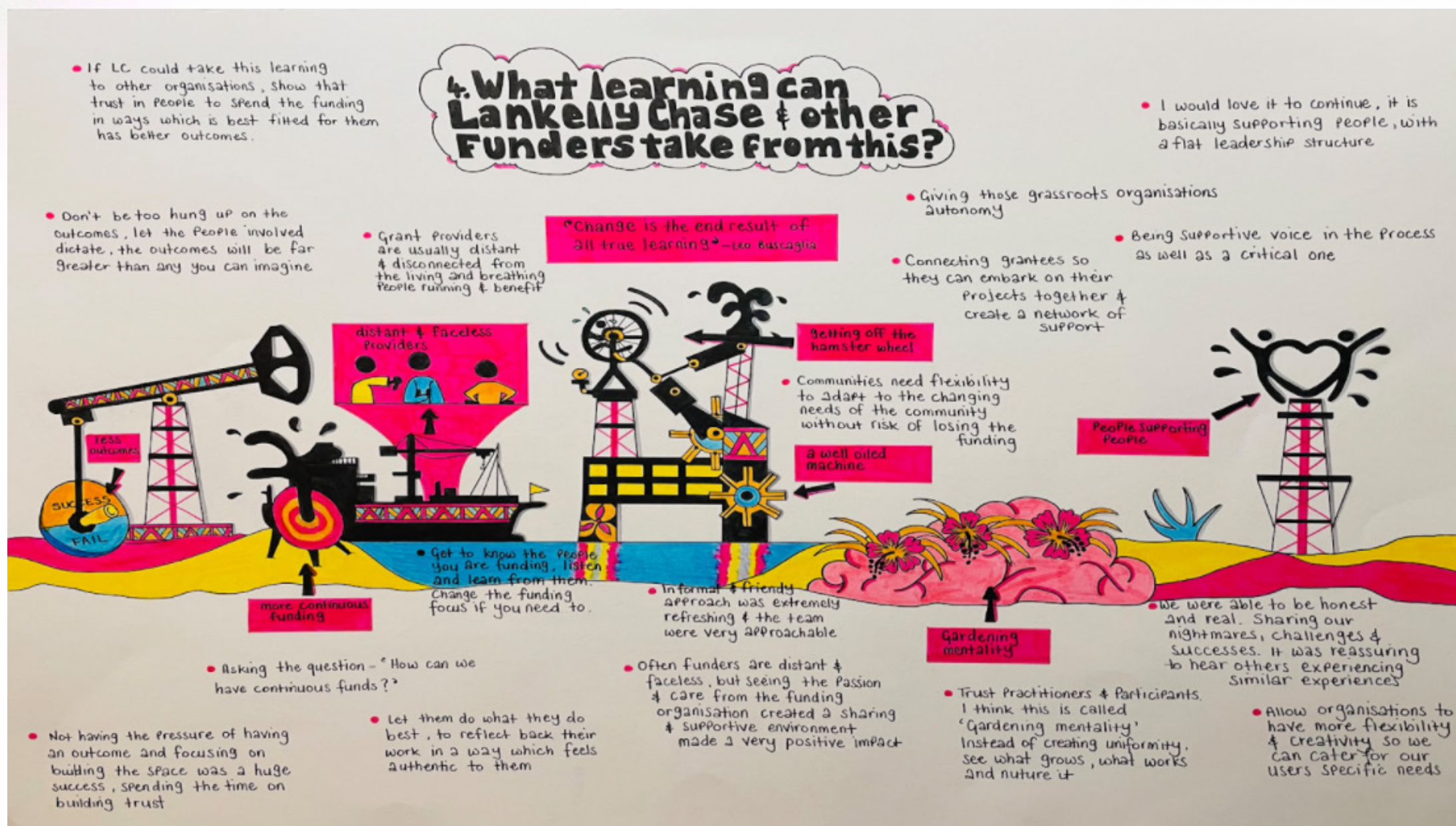
We, as the core team holding resources, see ourselves as only temporary, a step on the way to something more consistent with the future we want to see...

Through 1-2-1 conversations and an anonymous online survey we were able to go deeper into our relationships. We held sensemaking sessions to see what needed to happen next.

What hit home for us

- There is a vast ocean of trauma from people's lived experience of injustice and inequity.
- People doing the work in communities are utterly exhausted.

- People want to collaborate with, and not compete against, each other.
- People know how to create and maintain healthy systems rooted in equity, justice, compassion and love. They just don't have the resources...



What next

Based on the decisions emerging from the sense-making, which themselves were drawn from the reflections gathered across the last year, urgent follow-on funding was provided to 30 of the people, groups, organisations and networks from the spaces community.

What does a Greater Manchester healed by justice, equity and liberation look like? We don't know just yet, but we're getting there. We are at the start of a process of which the spaces fund is an important part. Over time the various other inquiries and work streams that need to exist to make this dream a reality will emerge from the growing community of changemakers. We do have some hunches about what will be needed - we know for example that we will need to explore how this community governs itself.

In addition to follow-on funding for the spaces community, we are planning a Festival. GM Systems Changers are inviting all - old and new - partners, plus 'friends and family' to this gathering. It will include people holding a variety of roles - both formal and informal - from across all parts of the Greater Manchester system. And...it will be a celebration... of all the people and the work they do, of all the different knowledge they hold and perspectives they bring in. It will also be a place to strengthen existing and new connections between us all.

gmsystemschargers.org.uk/initiatives/

York MCN –
Catherine Scott,
York CVS and
Kelly Cunningham,
Changing Lives,
Lankelly Chase
associates



...This demands a different way of thinking that recognises that no single organisation, intervention or person can do this alone. It requires all of us.



Where:

York



What:

An open network for anyone concerned about extreme disadvantage and marginalisation in York



Who:

More than 150 people from across different sectors, from different backgrounds and from different hierarchical positions

The work

People in York want to radically improve things for individuals who experience multiple difficulties at the same time, and for whom the system's collective response is currently inadequate. This has resulted in the creation of York MCN - an unbounded group with a fluid membership of different system actors including people with lived experience, frontline workers, academics, policy makers and senior leaders.

We come together regularly to explore how we can create the conditions for a healthier system in York. The network provides a space to share experiences, forge stronger links and build trusting relationships that can lead to more collaborative actions. Different working groups, each involving a mix of people, have formed to take forward action on specific issues including co-commissioning, co-location (working better together), and creative action (making sure everything is developed with people with lived experience).

The York MCN Enabling Team (hosted by different VCSE organisations, and made up of Lankelly Chase associates – Catherine Scott and Kelly Cunningham, and our Communications Officer, Emmie Wise) helps to weave some of this work together and to connect it with other related activity in the city. We also run training and workshops on a range of topics and useful methodologies for systems change.

Drawing on the system behaviours, we have focused on trying to share power and promote equality of voice. Much of the early work was about unpicking what this actually means to people, exploring what gets in the way, and how we might create the conditions for shared power and equality of voice to flourish. Our cultural values work (a process involving people using and working in services which explored what is and isn't working in the current culture in York and what the desired culture might be) has provided a real opportunity to focus on this. It put a spotlight on the concept of 'agency', and has led into work exploring how power, permission and agency can be thought about differently.

Challenges – what gets in the way?

- Power dynamics
- The assumption that 'service-land' can and should 'fix' people
- Ego - individual and organisational
- The ferocious speed of commissioning and funding cycles
- A culture of outcomes and key performance indicators
- Deep-rooted cultural norms and behaviours
- Competition
- Lack of resources
- Fear
- Unhelpful assumptions, for example, that it is other people and not us who are the problem or have the power to change things



Impact on the wider system?

We started the network as a coalition of the willing. We knew that making stuff better wouldn't be easy but we had energy for it. This energy has grown and grown.

The gifts and talents within the York system - the wealth of knowledge, the passion of people trying to make change, the bravery of individuals to step forward to say something isn't working - have blossomed.

Our advice...

- It takes time. You need to go slow to go fast, and this is often against the norm.
- The work is very much affected by the context. Don't try and lift and shift anything, or get bogged down by comparisons with other areas
- Be mindful of 'not doing the do' if you are in a 'weaving' role.
- Celebrate your success - even the small stuff, like people showing up.
- Uncertainty and ambiguity are defining features of complex situations, and systems thinking can provide a way to navigate this. Acknowledging and accepting this frees up space to explore how we respond to and navigate these situations better.
- Be acutely aware of how you show up (mindful of your own power and privilege) and make space to reflect on how the work can make you feel. Coaching can really support this.
- Don't expect systems thinking approaches to be everyone's cup of tea.



Be acutely aware of how you show up (mindful of your own power and privilege) and make space to reflect on how the work can make you feel.



People would see that they have many allies working alongside them on this collective endeavour, and that together positive change is possible.

Our hopes for the future if this kind of practice was the norm...

It seems that place-based working is becoming much more common, yet funding for the infrastructure for this work isn't. Our hopes would be that infrastructure to support systems change is seen less as a luxury and more of a necessity.

The same goes for the role of learning. We think there needs to be a shift in approach to governance and accountability, as well as evaluation. We would hope to see this re-imagined, with a move away from a traditionally hierarchical, bureaucratic and 'audit-review' approach, to a more systemic, open and learning-based model.

If this kind of practice was the norm, we would hope that when we feel unsupported, challenged or threatened we would be able to have honest conversations, confidently leaning into the conflict, knowing that we have the skills and capabilities to manage it, rather than reverting back to old habits.

Perhaps this would provide a bit of a remedy to the feelings of loneliness, or this work being just 'too difficult'. Instead, people would see that they have many allies working alongside them on this collective endeavour, and that together positive change is possible.

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Meaningful Measurement – Sarah Cassidy, The Old Fire Station



Where:

Oxford



What:

A group of organisations working together to learn more about ways to understand change and impact from the point of view of people affected, to try different approaches and to use what we learn to help shift towards more 'human friendly' systems in Oxford.



Who:

Active Oxfordshire, African Families in the UK, The Old Fire Station, Oxford Hub, Oxford City Council



This is about more than just finding new tools – it's about a bigger shift in perspective away from a performance agenda, towards one centred around learning.

The work

The Old Fire Station is a centre for creativity in the heart of Oxford, welcoming to all. We encourage people from all backgrounds to understand and shape the world in which we live through stories, creativity and the arts, and by connecting with others.

We used to use form-filling and box-ticking to evaluate projects. We found that this undermined the relationships we built with people, distracted from the work in hand, and failed to reflect the complexity of the work and people involved.

In 2017, we decided to try something different: Storytelling.



Based on the [Most Significant Change](#) technique, Storytelling involves having conversations with different people about their experience of a project, and what it's meant to them. These conversations are edited into stories that capture the key things people said, in their own voice and words. Once we have a collection of stories, we then bring people together to discuss the themes and learning which emerge.

Over the last two years, we've gone from using Storytelling internally to building a local network of 25 organisations and counting who embrace this approach. As our Storytelling work has evolved and grown, so too has the wider conversation in Oxford around more meaningful approaches towards measurement. We've seen '[learning pods](#)' at Oxford City Council, the piloting of [Clear Signal](#) – a programme which generates data with residents in a participatory, bottom-up manner – and partners from across the city using Storytelling to evaluate impact.

In 2021 Oxford Hub and the Old Fire Station initiated an action inquiry called Meaningful Measurement, with support from friends at Active Oxfordshire, Oxford City Council, African Families in the UK and Lankelly Chase. Through this inquiry we are bringing partners together to learn about meaningful measurement, test tools in specific areas of the city, and use the findings to influence the system locally.

What we mean by Meaningful Measurement

The number of partners across Oxford using Storytelling, and the growing energy around other approaches, indicates a change taking place: people and organisations are moving away from traditional measurement models towards more creative, human ways of evaluating.

Conventional evaluation approaches often rely on pre-determined outcomes and key performance indicators – where we set goals in advance which become benchmarks against which success is measured. This can lead to a culture where people prioritise meeting targets and demonstrating ‘success’ – something that prevents people from responding creatively to the problem in front of them and allowing for the complexity of people’s lives.



People and organisations are moving away from traditional measurement models towards more creative, human ways of evaluating’

We love Storytelling because:

It doesn’t determine outcomes in advance – it allows people to describe what change looks and feels like for them

It’s good for understanding impact that is unexpected, emergent, personalised and diverse, and it’s good for really understanding how change happens.



it allows people to describe what change looks and feels like for them

Hearing stories in peoples’ own voices helps us to listen and connect on a human level.

It’s fun! Participants enjoy telling the story of a project, and it is a creative, meaningful way to say goodbye at the end of a project.

Challenges

There are limitations (it can be time-intensive, costly, and tends to emphasise what went well and focuses less on what didn’t) but we hope that through learning with others we can evolve the Storytelling, experiment with other methodologies, and use the stories we have to generate meaningful insights about the city of Oxford, and how services are designed and delivered across the country.

Shifting perspectives

However, this is about more than just finding new tools – it’s about a bigger shift in perspective away from a performance agenda, towards one centred around learning.

To shift away from a performance agenda towards a learning agenda, we need people to feel empowered to experiment, work creatively, acknowledge failures and learn through reflection. This culture shift can only happen if those involved in setting the agenda – commissioners, funders, governing bodies – are also part of the evolving conversation around more meaningful approaches towards measurement which are based on listening carefully and which encourage shifts in power.

How can we move towards ways of measuring impact that enable us to learn about complex problems and the people experiencing them, so we can listen, adapt and improve? How do we find ways of understanding what real change is taking place and how? How do we make evaluation a manageable process, which informs commissioning and service design? These are some of the questions we are beginning to explore in more depth through the Meaningful Measurement action inquiry. Over the next year we’ll be working together to learn more about meaningful measurement, experiment with and test different approaches and use what we learn to help shift the way we listen, collaborate and work towards more ‘human friendly’ systems in Oxford. This will include further developing our storytelling work, piloting using resident led data collection through Clear Signal, and exploring wider evaluation methodologies. This work will be central to our conversations at Oxford’s annual event for social change - Marmalade 2022.

oldfirestation.org.uk
marmalade.io/

Gateshead Futures –

Andy Crosbie,
Collective
Impact Agency



Where:

Gateshead



What:

An open network for people in Gateshead to meet and talk



Who:

More than 40 people, mainly working across the VCSE and public sectors



People come to the space as individuals, as human beings, rather than as their professional roles...'

The work

Gateshead Futures is an open network that came together during the first 2020 lockdown. It was originally conceived as being for people living or working across Gateshead to co-design the future they wanted to see for the borough. Over two years, it has evolved to be much more about relationships, learning and reflection.

There are upwards of forty people on the mailing list, mainly working across the VCSE and public sectors. Every second Wednesday, a member of the group introduces a topic that interests them, sparking an unfacilitated discussion.

People come to the space as individuals, as human beings, rather than as their 'professional roles'. Every session starts with a check-in, where everyone can hear something about each other's lives. This helps us to develop a much richer picture of perspectives, as the lens of participation isn't restricted to any professional opinion or party line. Anyone can bring any topic they like, which plays to people's curiosity, their strengths, or areas of life or work they'd like to explore with the help of others.

Over the past two years, this space has helped people to feel part of an interconnected whole. Hearing other people thinking about the same things as them, recognising the challenges we're going through are shared rather than individual, all this has been incredibly valuable. It has also been useful to learn where people think differently to us and have a contrasting viewpoint to our own. This has often helped us all look at the things we're dealing with in new ways and new lights.

Challenges

In 2020, the need for this space struck a chord with many people. We came to appreciate that a space for shared learning is inherently valuable, even if it never leads to action plans. In the long lockdowns of 2020, human connection was exactly what many people needed. 2021 was a different year. Attendance was lower as people's work lives became busier, trying to balance the digital with the face-to-face.

This forum emerged in the months after an inquiry into learning in Gateshead. That inquiry found that people and organisations do want to learn but cannot find the time to do it – in essence, learning is treated as a luxury. As the pressure has mounted to return to something more resembling 'normality,' many people have found themselves unable to reserve that time once more. Life simply gets in the way. As a consequence, the range of perspectives in the space is smaller.

2022 will therefore see a shakeup of Gateshead Futures. We're focusing more closely on the Gateshead locality itself, and thinking about how to adapt the forum to encourage people to prioritise giving time to it. Perhaps this will mean having more of a practical learning focus rather than abstract reflections – all that is yet to emerge.

Covid-permitting, we plan to bring people together in person to share their work on systems, their thinking, and to explore how we can build healthier systems in Gateshead. We know that learning together will play a role in it, the question is simply 'how does it all weave together?'

If this were the norm...

Of course, if dedicated time to learn and connect was the norm, it wouldn't feel like a luxury. We wouldn't feel the tug of time-sensitive work commitments pulling us away from those spaces, valuable as we find them. We've shown what's possible while people have the time available to learn together – as many did in the earlier lockdowns, when the world hadn't adjusted to home working. One of the most powerful things you can ever do is show that another way is possible. What we need to do now is experiment with how we can build that learning and connecting into the world as it is now rather than the world as it was in 2020.

Our advice...

To anyone out there thinking about setting up a similar learning network, our advice would be to not get too hung up on planning and instead to invest your energy in developing a genuine sense of group ownership. Gateshead Futures has changed significantly twice already and is set to change again in the near future. This has been based on the group itself identifying what it needs – through shared conversations – and reorienting itself on the fly. In these bizarre changeable times of Covid, why would you ever try to do anything else?

Andy Crosbie
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A Commentary

are we seeing
the change we
want to see?

Max French and Amy Wheatman,
Northumbria University
(learning partners to Lankelly's
place-based work)

Perspective is one of the key pillars of the System Behaviours. It relates to how people recognise their own position within a broader whole, how shared visions are co-created and how strengths are recognised in others' perspectives and enable learning.

Our previous research, had noted a number of barriers relating to this position. Here, we reflect on some signals of progress made, drawing from the interviews, learning communities and discussions we have had in the time since.

In the earlier research, a number of occasions were noted where people felt constrained by the limited range of perspectives involved in the work. One individual, reflecting on developments they had been involved with, noted:

“The work in [this place] has not emerged as a multi-stakeholder perspective, and it is difficult to try and retrofit it.”

We can see now that there are several areas where relationships have been built and power shared over time: the formation of ‘core’ teams taking responsibility for local stewardship of activity, the expansion of initiatives and broadening of focus in several areas, and deepening relationships across the places themselves. Despite the pandemic, it might be that more relationships have been formed at the core of the place work over the last two years than at any point in its past.

Perspective as a system behaviour involves developing a shared vision which is systemic in focus. In practical terms, this was often expressed as moving from a project or organisational focus to a systemic understanding of problems, and a systemic basis for developing potential solutions. Every area is now involved in drawing a much broader range of perspectives into decision making processes, either through models of participatory grantmaking, community engagement, or direct representation on budgetary decision making bodies. Through these opportunities, and other initiatives like the Systems Changers programme, people have had the opportunity to develop a broader systemic outlook:

“One of the hardest things, really, has been people realising that there is no perfect decision. You can see people thinking, “I’ve got this, this is exactly how it should be,” and then someone else’s perspective, and they’re like, “Oh, this has just changed everything I thought.”

We have also seen much more recognition of the value of involving divergent perspectives. One example of this has been in the context of new budgetary decision-making roles which actors in several places have stepped into. Our previous report noted actors feeling assailed by “questions about legitimacy and power”. This time round we found most people far more comfortable with stepping into power, with a broader diversity of perspectives a crucial legitimising factor. This was particularly important in helping people feel comfortable making funding decisions.

“Just to even know that the five of us, six of us were in charge of £300,000 was insane, right? That’s like a couple of houses put together (...) which is why we were really focused around: who are we not taking into consideration? Who are we missing? Who are the people we need to bring in?”

Finally, perspective involves recognising and valuing the skills and strengths of others. We found a more cohesive and integrated approach existed in several areas compared with the last report. This was again apparent in the ‘core’ groups of actors in place which, whether grouped together into a ‘coordination team’ or existing as a more loosely grouped collection of individuals, were given time to develop trust and an appreciation of different perspectives and strengths. People could pinpoint and therefore better integrate and utilise one another’s strengths:

“So, [Person A] brings all of her creative communities (...) [Laughter] she was our baby on the team – so you would never know because she’s so wise (...) there’s a bit of [Person B] (...) having gone through the systems changers programme and knowing lots of people in lots of different boroughs. [Person C], her work is predominantly with incredibly marginalised Black women, and then [Person D] brings with it that systems’ convening that he does so beautifully”.

Thoughts to end with..

Paul Connery, Andy Crosbie,
Kelly Cunningham, Sara
Fernandez, Avril McIntyre,
Catherine Scott, locally based
Lankelly Chase associates





Challenges will always be there but it's how they are approached, collaboratively, that will bring about a healthier system.

If the above practises were normalised and our collective mindsets shifted, there would be no need for roles such as the associates because people from different parts of the system would be in relationship with each other, approaching issues and challenges together with an open and curious mind.

There would be the recognition that nobody has all the answers and that it is through hearing different perspectives that we are able to work through these challenges together.

There is no destination with this work. There is no 'there' to get to. Challenges will always be there but it's how they are approached, collaboratively, that will bring about a healthier system.

A system where a vision for the future is shared across many people and where resources are liberated to those closest to its issues, stresses and challenges is one that is vibrant and constantly changing. It will be a place that is better to live in and better to work in as the skills and creativity of everyone are freed from old ways of working.

Despite the messiness and complexities of this work, it is a privilege to be involved in it and as we all learn together it feels like the right approach, one of constant learning and adaptation where nobody is the expert and yet we all have something valuable to contribute.

The deeper you go the more you realise that it's about relationships and bringing more of ourselves to the role, which not only supports people to develop personally but creates deeper connections and relationships than you traditionally get in a work environment.

Change is complex and messy but when you see the shoots begin to rise above the ground it can feel exhilarating and rewarding. This work can only have a chance of succeeding if we bring more people into these conversations with a genuine desire to listen and respond to what they hear. It cannot be done in closed rooms with the usual suspects otherwise it will fail as it has done before. Genuine collaboration and exploring issues around power and how to share it are key for this work to flourish.



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Lankelly Chase

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